THE BLACK PHONE IS CALLING YOU

THIS ISSUE'S AN ABSOLUTE SCREAM

FANGORIA®

VOL 2 #14

STAB

2021'S BEST DEATHS

VOTE FOR THE 2022 CHAINSAW AWARDS!

FANGORIA®

VOL 2 #14

MONSTERS • ALIENS • BIZARRE CREATURES

SCREAM: GHOSTFACE BLEEDS THE FIFTH

GUESS WHO'S TURNING 100?

FANGO ♥s DEVON SAWA

$19.79

8 60006 49343 1

FANGORIA Nº 362 ▽|JAN| ▽|22| ▽|022022|

THE BLACK PHONE

LONG DISTANCE DEAD-ICATION

ALL THINGS SERVE THE FUCKIN BEAM

www.ka-tet19.net

JANUARY 2022

FANGORIA

VOL 2
#14

GUTS

14 **THE BEST DEATHS OF 2021** *Matt Donato*

16 **A LOOK AT CONTEMPORARY SLASHER FILMS** *Richard Newby*

22 **A NEW STAB AT *SCREAM*** *Kevin Williamson & Radio Silence*

29 **THE *SCREAM* LEGACY** *Brian Collins*

32 **A *STAB* APPRECIATION** *Mike Scollins*

34 **SET VISIT: *SLAPFACE*** *Michael Gingold*

37 **THE FANGORIA 2022 CHAINSAW AWARD NOMINEES**

38 **LUCKY MCKEE ON *MAY*, *THE WOMAN*, AND *DARLIN'***
Jourdain Searles

42 **SET VISIT: *THE LAST THING MARY SAW*** *Michael Gingold*

44 **THAT TIME THEY MADE A KIDS' NOVEL OUT OF *ALIEN***
Michael Gingold

46 **A CONVERSATION ON *THE BLACK PHONE***
C. Robert Cargill, Scott Derrickson and Joe Hill

53 ***THE BLACK PHONE*: MAKING THE GRABBER'S MASK** *Jason Baker*

55 **HORROR'S FAIRY TALE ROOTS** *Dr. James Francis, Jr.*

58 ***NOSFERATU* AT 100** *Rich Johnson*

63 **DRACULA GETS WEIRD** *Chris Evangelista*

66 **VERA WEST: HORROR'S FIRST GREAT COSTUME DESIGNER**
Jolene Richardson

71 **RETROSPECTIVE: TYBURN FILMS** *Brett Gallman*

74 **RETROSPECTIVE: *DEMON LOVER DIARY*** *Rodney Ascher*

79 **THE TATTOO ART OF PAUL ACKER** *Dan Fraga*

82 **INTERVIEW: DEVON SAWA** *Scott Wampler*

87 **CUSTOM CARNAGE: BESTDEATHS.COM** *Sean Abley*

GRAVY

4 **INVOCATION**
Phil Nobile Jr.

5 **THE POSTAL ZONE**

6 **MONSTER INVASION**
Brett Gallman

9 **FEST FINDS**
Samuel Zimmerman

10 **EXORDIUM**
Michael Gingold

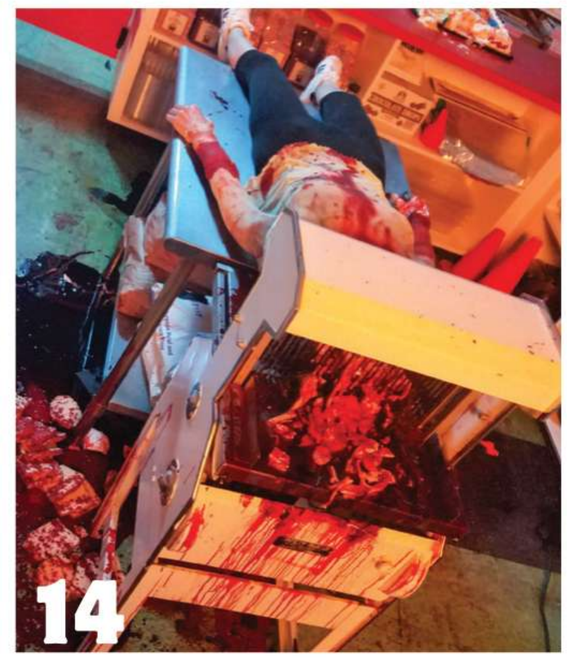
12 **SCENE QUEEN**
Barbara Crampton

90 **THE KINGCAST**
Eric Vespe

92 **RATED XX/XY**
Anya Stanley

96 **NIGHTMARE LIBRARY**
Ahlissa Eichhorn

98 **CLASSIFIED AD VAULT/ THINGS TO COME**



ON OUR COVER: (SUBSCRIBER) SCREAM: PHOTOS: PARAMOUNT PICTURES - ILLUSTRATION: JASON KAUZLARICH // (NEWSTAND) THE BLACK PHONE - PHOTO: FRED NORRIS/UNIVERSAL PICTURES - PICTURED: JACOB MORAN AND MASON THAMES

FANGORIA

JANUARY 2022
VOLUME 2 | ISSUE 14

Publishers
Tara Ansley & Abhi Goel

Editor-in-Chief
Phil Nobile Jr.

Creative Director
Jason Kauzlarich

Operations Manager
Jimmy Shaw

Managing Editor
Ariel Fisher

Digital Editor
Angel Melanson

Contributors
Sean Abley
Rodney Ascher
Jason Baker
Matt Bettinelli-Olpin
C. Robert Cargill
Brian Collins
Barbara Crampton
Scott Derrickson
Matt Donato
Ahlissa Eichhorn
Chris Evangelista
Dan Fraga
Dr. James Francis, Jr.
Brett Gallman
Tyler Gillett
Michael Gingold
Joe Hill
Rich Johnson
Vanessa McKee
Devin "Spicy Donut" Lawson
Richard Newby
Jolene Richardson
Mike Scollins
Jourdain Searles
Anya Stanley
Eric Vespe
Chad Villella
Scott Wampler
Kevin Williamson
Samuel Zimmerman

Special Thanks
Lauren Bantit
Karen Barragan
Kelley McGinnis
Carlee Osborn
Damion Stene
Newell Todd
Ryan Turek

This issue is dedicated to Halyna Hutchins.

© 2022 by FANGORIA Publishing, LLC. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in anHalyna Hutchinss without prior written permission. Printed in the U.S.A. To learn how we collect and use your information, visit the privacy link at FANGORIA.com. FANGORIA magazine is published four times a year, in January, April, July and October. This is Issue #14 of Volume 2 (ISSN 0164-2111). To learn more about subscriptions, please visit us at www.FANGORIA.com or email subscriptions@FANGORIA.com. For all other inquiries, please email info@FANGORIA.com. FANGORIA accepts no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts, photos, arts, or other materials, but we do consider freelance pitches via email at editorial@FANGORIA.com.

ALL UNCREDITED PHOTOS FROM FANGORIA VAULT

INVOCATION

Blurry New Year

On the heels of 2020 and 2021, it feels like it's never been harder to look ahead. The curve balls with which we've all collectively been beaned over the past 21 months have left us permanently concussed, our long-distance vision rendered indefinitely blurry, and trying to look even six months down the road seems almost impossible.

How can we begin to guess what's coming in 2022? The work-from-home measures introduced by the pandemic have thrown our preconceived notions of work-life balance into turmoil. Online shopping exploded during Covid, spinning supply chains into chaos. And though horror movies have proven to be the closest thing to a pandemic-proof genre, the movie industry seems on the precipice of being forever changed by the various same-day-streaming experiments undertaken in 2021. We're in the middle of a sea change, and change upsets people.

So we retreat into the familiar. For you, it might mean firing up a horror favorite (maybe even on VHS to give you extra pangs of cozy nostalgia). That makes sense; on page 55, Dr. Richard Francis outlines how horror has its roots in classic children's stories, tales generally accepted as tools to teach but which mostly came to comfort children. Evil is punished; the world is returned to normalcy. Happily Ever After. It is why many of us turn to the genre.

For your non-horror loving neighbor, retreat might mean pining for a simpler past as they feel anxiety about the tumultuous present, becoming aggravated at the ubiquitous earmarks of change. This might explain the viral videos of Covid mask tantrums, people melting down in Target over what they believe is threatening their way of life. They just want to buy their Chex Mix and their Charmin, like they've done for years; why do you have to remind them that the world may never be the same again? It's all panic and fear and misdirected anger, and the thing is: *I get it*. Pandemic or not, I contend every day with one detail or another that tells me the world is passing me by. It's not a good feeling! People not used to such shifts are feeling deprioritized and left behind, and when you feel that control slipping, it's easy to give yourself permission to lose whatever control you have left.

If you're a horror fan AND a spun-out dinosaur like me, I have more bad news: you will find no solace in contemporary horror. On page 16, Richard Newby connects the dots between the films of the recent slasher resurgence and finds a common thread: our predecessors are being de-centered and, in response, making things worse. The overarching lesson of these films, Newby argues, is that the previous generation has left its kids a mess to deal with, and if they're lucky, they *might* survive. That's grim (and maybe even Grimm).

Seek comfort in horror if you need to. (Your VHS tapes from the '80s were supposed to have deteriorated 20 years ago; every day is a gift!) But don't get angry at the new movies when you don't find that same comfort in them. Any legit genre fan knows that horror has always been about confronting the unpleasant; surely our own obsolescence is fair game. But as fans, wherever we fall on the timeline, we should be excited about horror's fertile future — even if we can't always see it coming.

Phil Nobile Jr., Editor-in-Chief

The Postal Zone

People are always asking us how they can have their writing published in FANGORIA. Here you go!
This is your space to get heard, get loud and get opinionated. Brevity is preferred; having a point of view is required.
Hit us up at **MAIL@FANGORIA.COM**

MURDER TO MY EARS

I've been thinking a lot about music lately. Particularly the soundtracks of slasher films. Aside from notable scores from the likes of *Freaky* and 2018's *Halloween*, it seems we're reaching a point in the musical space where slashers are having some of the most forgettable scores. So my possible solution: Should we go back to the style of films like *Scream 3* or *Freddy vs. Jason* and having licensed soundtracks in addition to scores, or do you think it would put an expiration date on the film? I know it was a hit with *Fear Street* (granted, those were period pieces).

-Reyna Cervantes

1. *There was a reason* 1666 *was my favorite* Fear Street *installment: no goddamn needle drops!*
2. *The expiration date you mention is intriguing;* The Black Phone *engages in some aggressive pop music out of the gate, and it actually started the film on a wobble for me. The ensuing 100 minutes earned those pop songs, though, and I think proves that pop music in horror is a tough needle to thread. But if the new Scream doesn't have Nick Cave's "Red Right Hand"...*

-PN

WHOOPS

In our last issue, we accidentally miscredited some of the amazing behind-the-scenes pics from *Dragula*; they were taken by the amazing Bird Lambro, who also took the shot seen here. Please forgive us, Bird! You're the best! - PN

WANTED! MORE READERS LIKE:

Sheila Marie (IG: @sheila__marie) // Photos by David Catalano - seancemode.com

TERROR TRIPS

By Brett Gallman

THE HORROR COMMUNITY'S DEVOTION TO THEIR BELOVED GENRE KNOWS NO BOUNDARIES. SOMETIMES, IT'S NOT ENOUGH TO BESTOW ICONIC STATUS TO A FILM, SO EVERYTHING ABOUT IT– CHARACTERS, CREATORS, PERFORMERS–EARNS THE HONOR. IN MANY CASES, THE FILMING LOCATIONS HAVE BECOME HALLOWED GROUND WHERE FANS MAKE PILGRIMAGES. SOME, LIKE THE GAS STATION FROM THE *TEXAS CHAIN SAW MASSACRE* AND KENNY CAPERTON'S MYERS HOUSE REPLICA, HAVE EVEN BECOME MONETIZED TOURIST DESTINATIONS. IT WAS ONLY A MATTER OF TIME UNTIL A FILM LIKE TERROR TRIPS CAME ALONG TO CAPITALIZE ON THIS PHENOMENON.

Hatched by writer/director Jeff Seemann and co-producer Felissa Rose, *Terror Trips* finds a group of horror fans providing guided tours of infamous genre locations for fellow devotees. After visiting several domestic locations (The Abaddon Hotel, Camp NoBeBoSco, and the Monroeville Mall, among others) without incident, the group plots a European excursion that will make stops at the filming locations for *An American Werewolf in London* and *Hostel*. However, tour leaders George (Abigail Esmena) and Dan (Mike Blaney) have also found something off the beaten path: the small Polish town that housed the production of *Black Volga*, a 1973 film based on an urban legend that proves to be all too real when the Terror Trips gang runs afoul of the sadistic locals.

Seemann's inspiration for *Terror Trips* fittingly came from an infamous horror site in Burkittsville, Maryland. After attending the town's annual Blair Witch Experience, he started plotting the script, starting with a simple question. "What if the

KATARINA (IRYNA SCAROLA) AND LUDWIG (ASHTON ROGERS) HELP DAN (MIKE BLANEY) RELAX. WE THINK.

Blair Witch legend were true, and she started hunting us for trespassing on her land?" Seemann explains. He answers that question in brutal fashion, subjecting his horror hounds to exactly the sort of ordeal they should be equipped to survive. After all, they're on their home turf, so to speak: horror fans caught in a horror movie.

In this respect, *Terror Trips* takes a cue from *Scream*, only it imagines a scenario where everyone is Randy. "Horror fans feel the deepest connection to Randy because he's one of them, Seemann tells me, adding: "He takes the lessons he learns from horror films and adapts them to his current situation," something the characters in *Terror Trips* must do in a film that peppers in several genre references between its locations and the characters' banter. Anyone who's ever watched a horror movie and insisted their knowledge of the genre would ensure their survival might recognize themselves here.

However, that doesn't necessarily mean they'll be comforted. "I wanted our characters to know they were in danger and understand their predicament, but still make the same dumb mistakes that all horror movie victims make," Seemann says, underscoring the importance of a body count. "In the end, it doesn't matter what you do in a horror film. There is no escape unless you're a final girl."

While the famous locations and the gory, metafictional playfulness are clever entry points to *Terror Trips*, the evocation of its little-known Polish lore provides an even more haunting hook. According to local legend, various boogeymen (Seemann's script conjures the KGB) once prowled the country in a phantasmal black car to abduct children. When searching for inspiration to form the bulk of his story, Seemann again looked to *The Blair Witch Project*, particularly its "rich backstory" and its "incredible amount of depth." To make the terror more authentic, he began researching foreign urban legends before landing on the Black Volga. "The more I researched it, the scarier it got," he says. "I still haven't found any truth to the rumors of the KGB kidnapping children, but that urban legend is out there and scaring kids."

In *Terror Trips*, the Black Volga is more concerned with dispatching the curious American interlopers in a scene that recalls the likes of *Hostel*. A character named Eli, a horror fanatic who's into "weird, vicious films," pays tribute to that film's director, whose influence is felt throughout the film. Seemann also cites other gore-soaked nightmare vacations of the era like *Turistas* and *Wrong Turn* as influences. Not content

"Anyone who's ever watched a horror movie and insisted their knowledge of the genre would ensure their survival might recognize themselves here."

GEORGE (ABIGAIL ESMENA) MAKES A MESSY DISCOVERY IN *TERROR TRIPS*.

PHOTOS COURTESY LRB PRODUCTIONS / JEFF SEEMANN

to simply mimic the violence of those films, Seemann also takes inspiration from their ominous sense of alienation. "The whole aura of helplessness in a foreign land, lost and unable to speak the language – it adds a layer of fear," he says.

Before moving to the director's chair for the first time on *Terror Trips*, Seemannn spent several years on other sets in various capacities, where he observed numerous directors, including Emilio Estevez and Joe Lynch. He particularly picked up on how these filmmakers developed a rapport with their cast and crew, noting, "It's fun to see what kind of magic you can produce when the director and the actor are on the same page, so I quickly picked up on the importance of that bond." His cast also bolsters the film's genre credentials by featuring familiar names in Hannah Fierman (*V/H/S*), L.C. Holt (*You're Next*), Damian Maffei (*The Strangers: Prey at Night*), and Chaney Morrow (*Haunt*).

They're joined behind the scenes by *Sleepaway Camp* alum Rose, who has been a producer on the independent scene for over a decade. With over 25 producing credits to her name, Rose brings both a seasoned perspective and an outgoing personality to *Terror Trips*. She considers the collaborative nature of filmmaking to be one of the most thrilling aspects of the process. "I love people so I enjoy myself on set, and bringing team spirit is my specialty," she tells me. When I asked her what drew her to *Terror Trips*, she highlighted the fan-friendly premise: "I knew the story would appeal to our community so it was something that I was attracted to immediately." Like Seemann, she also has high praise for the cast. "Once Jeff had the cast in place, it was an absolute winner," she adds. "I know the audience will be captivated by the performances!"

Both Seemann and Rose highlighted the importance of Maffei, a long-time genre presence who has been making films for 25 years. "Damian read the *Terror Trips* script and immediately got excited," the director tells me, before rattling off Maffei's contributions to the film. "He brought Felissa into the production, he suggested Hannah, he gave us L.C., and he arranged a deal with the artist to design the old-school poster for the film that I am completely in love with. Damian made this a better film, and I am forever in his debt." After collaborating with Maffei for 20 years, Rose calls him her "little brother," adding: "We both grew up in New York, so we speak the same language. We adore this genre and have done a lot of films together."

Speaking of familiar horror locations, Rose is also heading back to Camp Arawak as a producer and participant for *Angela: The Official Sleepaway Camp Documentary*. Calling it a "cool doc by Mike Perez," she hopes to "unlock some of the still unanswered mysteries and theories about this film." It will also be an opportunity for Rose and fans alike to hear from the original film's director. "I've always wanted to hear more from Robert Hiltzik," she says about the project, which is currently in production. In the meantime, prepare to book some time with *Terror Trips* in early 2022. 💀

TERROR TRIPS PRODUCER FELISSA ROSE ON LOCATION.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JEFF SEEMAN

MASON (MASON OWENS) MAKES AN ANALOG DISCOVERY IN *LANDLOCKED*.

JANUARY 2022

FEST FINDS

Landlocked

BY SAMUEL ZIMMERMAN

The first two houses I lived in–I mean really grew up and came of age in – have long since been demolished. There have been quite a few since then. I lived with immediate and extended family in apartments and homes, volleying back and forth between cities and towns. I like to think it contributes to a lightness of being, a lack of attachment to one structure. Home is ultimately where my loved ones are. Where I say it is.

But I still dream about that first house.

Those dreams are not a comfort. They aren't warm returns, or beautiful recollections. They tend to be eerie, melancholy tours of a place I never quite figured out. Paul Owens' remarkable lo-fi creeper, *Landlocked* – perhaps also best described as an eerie, melancholy tour – has trawled those images from the back of my brain and for you, may do the same.

In suburban New Jersey, a father has died. Now, the family house is to be torn down. In the days preceding its demolition, young son Mason returns home to scavenge anything he wants and simply be in his childhood space, longing for connection to happier times. Once there, he makes an incredible discovery: an S-VHS camcorder, one that impossibly presents you with images of the past when you look through its lens. So, Mason begins to not only observe these memories but obsessively record them, building a library of his family's existence until it's all-consuming and we're left wondering: are some figures in the tapes *gazing back*?

Owens, whose directorial work has primarily been in documentaries, blends the medium with a subtle, but devastating horror device and his very own family, using archival home videos while employing his brothers and father to star in the film as well. In being so familial onscreen and off, *Landlocked* recalls recent microbudget treasures like the Adams family's *The Deeper You Dig* and *Hellbender*, and Jordan Graham's utterly unnerving *Sator*. Both *Landlocked* and *Sator* reckon with familial history in an observational, decidedly doc-like manner that summon an overwhelming, intense intimacy – a closeness so real it feels as frightening as the time-defying video camera.

Landlocked presents simply, with a raw, natural aesthetic that's deceptive. There is, in fact, a world hidden within this film, a lingering caution about getting lost in loss and growing too attached to what once was. Mason's brothers, Paul (played by the filmmaker) and Seth, clearly have their own relationships to the home, telegraphed in terse verbal exchanges, distant mannerisms and clandestine actions. Mason, in his quest for a piece of his childhood, witnessing moments he couldn't possibly recall, is at odds with everyone's singular perspectives. Here, there is no collective memory. Even the past, terrifyingly, has a mind of its own. 💀

PHOTOS COURTESY OF PAUL OWENS

PHOTO: FOX SEARCHLIGHT PICTURES

Michael Gingold's

Exordium

Box-Office Poisons

As I write these words, Edgar Wright's *Last Night in Soho* and Scott Cooper's *Antlers*, two of the year's more anticipated horror films, opened in theaters nationwide a couple of weeks ago — but that anticipation hasn't translated to financial success. Despite the imprimaturs of Wright on Soho and producer Guillermo del Toro on *Antlers*, both movies debuted to just over $4 million in their mutual first weekend, and look likely to top out at somewhere between $10 and $11 million each. Combined, that's just a little more than what *Halloween Kills* made in its first Thursday night and Friday alone two weeks prior.

This isn't going to be a commentary about which of these films did or did not deserve their success or lack thereof, qualitatively. It shouldn't have been surprising that David Gordon Green's follow-up to his massively popular 2018 *Halloween* would do well, but the muted response to what seemed to be the eagerly awaited *Last Night* was more puzzling. Then you look over 2021's box office as a whole, and the comparative numbers emerge as part of a trend. Obviously, this has not been a typical year, as theatrical business struggled during the gradual recovery from the pandemic, and maybe in these troubled times, people sought comfort in the familiar. Of the 30 top-grossing movies at this writing, only three were not sequels, remakes, franchise films or based on previous IP, and only one of those, the Ryan Reynolds vehicle *Free Guy*, was a certifiable hit.

And so it went in the horror genre. The only fright film to pass the $100-million mark was *A Quiet Place Part II*; after *Halloween Kills*, next on the list was *The Conjuring: The Devil Made Me Do It*. The first in the supernatural series without James Wan at the helm posted solid numbers, while Wan's own original shocker *Malignant* languished despite strong reviews and fan buzz about its twisted final act. *Spiral: From the Book of Saw* was one of the few financial disappointments among fright franchise flicks, yet it still did more than three times the business of *The Night House*, which was riding raves from festivals and critics. The only standalone scare film to gross over $20 million was M. Night Shyamalan's *Old*, whose $48.2-million total was well below the writer-director's norm.

Of course, the box office has long been dominated by the familiar, yet just two years ago, *Us* was a smash and *Escape Room*, *Ma* and *Crawl* did respectable business. Over the past decade, small, idiosyncratic chillers like Robert Eggers' *The Witch* and Ari Aster's *Hereditary* and *Midsommar* broke out of the art-house circuit to become mainstream successes, and Blumhouse produced a string of low-cost, original hits (albeit followed by many sequels). Hell, summer 2020, when the country was in the depths of the pandemic, saw the Pierce Brothers' *The Wretched* gross nearly $2 million on a limited number of drive-in screens.

So what was up with the Halloweentime releases of 2021? It's tempting to adopt a position of perplexity, given that horror fans frequently bemoan the repetition seen in mainstream scare fare and express a desire for stuff that's fresh and different. If that's the case, where were they when *Last Night in Soho* and *Antlers* opened? (They weren't at home in front of their TVs; unlike *Halloween Kills*, which simultaneously premiered on the Peacock streaming service, those two were exclusively theatrical releases.) The answer, I believe, may lie in the fact that there are two kinds of horror fans. There are the diehards, the ones with a deep devotion to the genre, who live, breathe and eat this stuff, support and debate it on social media, and subscribe to magazines like this one. And then there are the casual fans, the ones simply out for a good fright on a Saturday night, the people who are more likely to be lured by a familiar face (or mask) and might be leery of something more *outré* or unfamiliar.

And thus it has ever been, really, if you look back at box-office trends in horror. There's no more beloved franchise to True Believers than *The Evil Dead*, but when its first wide studio-release entry, *Army of Darkness*, arrived in 1993, it was greeted with indifference by mainstream audiences. The 1980s spawned any number of great scary movies that wound up on the bottom half of the charts while *Friday the*

13th **and** ***Nightmare on Elm Street*** **sequels grabbed the money; I've frequently seen '80s favorites described as "hits" in recent years when in fact they had to wait for video before finding their audiences. Horror has obviously become much more of a financial force on the theatrical scene since then, and has left its niche status behind—yet the respective grosses of this year's late-October titles suggests that some of its potential viewership is more adventurous than others.**

But then again, on the other (severed) hand … perhaps hand-wringing over a movie's grosses isn't all that necessary. It has often been said that "awards are just the first draft of film history," and the same can be said of box-office performance. Topping the charts is no guarantee of longevity, any more than poor grosses assure that a film won't be remembered decades later; cinema history is filled with features that found passionate followers after (sometimes long after) their unsuccessful initial releases had concluded. This encouraging thought was reinforced for me a week after the debuts of ***Last Night in Soho*** **and** ***Antlers*****, during Exhumed Films' 24 Hour Horror-thon in Pennsylvania. The last two of the 15 features screened during this event were Joseph Ruben's** ***The Stepfather*** **and Peter Jackson's** ***The Frighteners*****, neither of which made much of a box-office impact when first released in 1987 and 1996 respectively. Despite positive reviews for both,** ***Stepfather*****'s independent distributor couldn't figure out how to sell it, while the studio-backed** ***Frighteners*** **suffered from a literally soft print ad campaign.**

The immediate fallout was different for the two movies; the right people saw ***Stepfather*****, which boosted the careers of director Ruben, star Terry O'Quinn and cinematographer John Lindley to the next level, while the disappointing** ***Frighteners*** **grosses have been cited as one reason Universal pulled the plug on its initial development of Jackson's** ***King Kong*****. Decades later, however, here they both were playing to several hundred people, most of whom had barely slept for the past 20 hours, who nonetheless applauded when the titles (not revealed until the films unspooled) appeared on screen and reacted throughout both with great enthusiasm. In particular, having first caught** ***The Stepfather*** **at a couple of barely attended showings back in '87, it was a thrill — and felt like vindication—to now sit in a packed house screaming and cheering it on. To amend the old saying: History is made at night, but not necessarily on the opening weekend.** 💀

AUDIENCES DIDN'T FLOCK TO *ANTLERS* (OPPOSITE) OR *LAST NIGHT IN SOHO* (RIGHT), BUT EVEN VENERATED TITLES LIKE *THE FRIGHTENERS* (ABOVE) TOOK SOME TIME TO FIND THEIR FANS.

PHOTO: PARISA TAGHIZADEH / © 2021 FOCUS FEATURES, LLC

SceneQueen

THE VALUE OF NOSTALGIA

WHEN TIMES ARE TOUGH, FRIGHT FILMS CAN BE AN UNLIKELY SOURCE OF COMFORT.

BY BARBARA CRAMPTON

How many of you rewatch your favorite movies? Personally, I can never get enough of *The Shining*, *The Exorcist* or *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. They're all so different, but each had a profound impact on me when I first saw them, and my fondness has only grown over time. Each subsequent viewing seems almost like visiting old friends. I get a warm, fuzzy feeling watching something I've seen a dozen times before.

LEATHERFACE PLUSH CUSHION COURTESY OF CREEPY CO.

So why do we do this? Are we trying to recreate the sensation of seeing it for the first time? I come back to some movies because they shocked me. By the time I was fifteen, I'd learned it was possible (relatively speaking) to be possessed, eaten by a family of raving lunatics, or to have the devil's kid. Until then, my life by comparison was pretty dull.

Sometimes, as with *The Exorcist* or *Rosemary's Baby*, they're such masterful films that repeat viewings are almost mandatory. But often, movies I adore are silly, glorious fun, like *The Frighteners* and *Tucker and Dale vs Evil*. Fans always tell me they love *Chopping Mall*, which, admittedly, isn't really a great movie, but it has its charms. It's campy and, dare I say, even a little schlocky. But some people love to rewatch it again and again, going back to it like you'd grab a well-loved blanket on a sad day.

It's as if we're reconnecting with something. A memory of a feeling or a moment. It's a source of comfort, especially in uncertain times, to return to something familiar. Revisiting the past is a vital part of living, and film has the unique ability to transport us to ephemeral points in our lives.

These stories touch us in ways only they can. They remind us of who we are and what we know is true; I can be as strong as Nancy Thompson and fight Freddy, or defend myself against Jack Torrance coming at me with a axe, even though I'm scared shitless. If I need to feel more powerful, I can rewatch *You're Next* and remind myself how Erin became the final girl by staring down every obstacle, including a crossbow.

There's solace in knowing what's about to happen, especially when our own lives feel so unpredictable.

Personally, I want to revel in horror tropes while watching an epic franchise like *Scream*. I see myself in that story. I am the hunter and the hunted, understanding and delighting in both. This is the essence of nostalgia: a sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past, typically for a period or place with happy personal associations.

No wonder some of our favorite horror franchises are so popular and remakes abound. With *Candyman*, *Halloween*, *Slumber Party Massacre*, *Chucky*, and the upcoming *Hellraiser*, *Scream* and *Christine*, our trips down Memory Lane are easier than an Uber ride across town. As you read this, a new *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* is about to debut on Netflix, and a new *Friday the 13th* is coming… soon, I hope. Even the Universal Monsters are coming back; Ryan Gosling will fill the furry frock of Lon Chaney Jr. in *The Wolfman*, and Karyn Kusama is in development on a new *Dracula*!

Movies are a business, and nostalgia can be cynically dismissed as a marketing tool. But I'm truly excited to see remakes, sequels and prequels. I love these iconic characters and want to go back to that familiar place where they live in my memory — a time I long for because of how much they meant to me once. I want to feel that again. The emotional response that created an indelible connection to something beautiful and terrifying.

Horror may primarily be rooted in a fear factor, but when you add a compelling story and characters you can actually connect with, you get a winning combination that fans like you and I will want to return to. Take Nancy Thompson, Ellen Ripley, Sally Hardesty or Sidney Prescott; all of them hold our attention by inviting us into their pain, terror and strength. Sometimes our emotional response stems from watching strength against all odds, such as Linda Hamilton's bravery as Sarah Connor. *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* was a big deal to me: It worked with the nostalgia for the first film while giving me someone new to root for, as the hunter becomes the protector.

Elisabeth Moss ferociously fights back in Leigh Whannell's *The Invisible Man*, delivering a remarkably nuanced and emotional performance. We all came back to it in part due to our nostalgia for the original, but we were given so much more emotional resonance.

Personally, I'd love to be a recurring character. I've yet to know what became of Katherine McMichaels in *From Beyond*. She went crazy at the end, but surely there's more…

Nostalgia goes a long way to allowing us to feel closer to the characters we've loved through the years. It's also why we'll never be truly finished with stories that feel like there's more to tell. And why would we want to be? 💀

KILLING IT

2021's Best Deaths in Horror

By Matt Donato

As we wrap another year of gory gratification (gorification?), let's toast those horror creators who believe in creating spectacular on-screen kills. Theaters reopened and finally premiered long-delayed titles, which — in tandem with streaming and on-demand — brought another crop of fantastic genre annihilations. Effortless beheadings, invaded eye sockets, bakery machinery mishaps — the works. They all deserve a special highlight here in the pages of FANGORIA.

1 The Bread Slicer (*Fear Street 1994*)

Every year, there's a horror kill that makes us shout "HOLY SHIT!" and Netflix's *Fear Street: 1994* takes that honor. Skull Mask catches Julia Rehwald's Kate as she dives into the bakery section where she deflects his knife swipe, only to get her face smashed into a cake. Kate ultimately gets stabbed in the gut and fed frosted-head-first into a bread slicer that shreds her dome into slivers like a sourdough loaf. Without a tablespoon of doubt, FX chef Christopher Nelson and his team earn their place atop this year's Kill List.

PHOTOS COURTESY CHRISTOPHER NELSON

2 Straight To The Point (*Halloween Kills*)

Halloween Kills earns its name, and I can't shake Marcus' (Michael Smallwood) death. Staring down Michael Myers after he's already killed children and past survivors, he finds himself trapped in an SUV's backseat. Michael plunges his blade through Marcus' eye, presumably puncturing his brain as the victim's other peeper rolls back in agony. Marcus' body slouches, expelling a strained wheeze like he's deflating after the kitchen utensil penetrates his face.

3 Two-For-One Decapitation (*Psycho Goreman*)

Steven Kostanski's *Psycho Goreman* fulfills its promise of bonkers bloodshed in many ways, including a double-decapitation of two street thugs. PG uses his immeasurable alien powers and levitates both lowlifes into his hands, clasps their necks, then snarks, "Perhaps in a few millennia you will make worthy adversaries, but not today!" PG yanks upward, and both heads tear from torsos in an eruption of crimson. It's our first introduction to PG's violent tendencies.

4 The Ultimate Shred (Slumber Party Massacre)

Danishka Esterhazy sneaks the drill-tip guitar from *Slumber Party Massacre II* into her remake/reboot for a ceremonious callback. Hapless dudebro Sean (Nathan Castle) challenges the Driller Killer to a duel using the girthy axe against the murderer's signature tool. The Driller Killer snips the tip of Sean's instrument, tangling the strings and tuning knobs on his whirring machine's pointed end. He pushes the upgraded weapon into Sean's face as chunks of flesh fly in all directions. His face is left inhumanly mangled, an unrecognizable crosshatch of exposed muscle, tissue, and teeth. Gnarly!

5 An Unfortunate Boning (Skull)

Skull: The Mask is another of 2021's most bountiful slaughterhouses, a Brazilian midnighter dripping in viscous crimson gunk. In a crowded nightclub, the film's eponymous killer lodges their blade into a partier's cranium, yanks him across the dancefloor, rips a spine shard out, then stabs said bone fragment into the forehead of another panicked attendee. *Skull: The Mask* goes above and beyond to make sure the slasher fans have plenty of madness to enjoy.

6 Finish Her (Mortal Kombat)

Yes, we included *Mortal Kombat* here because it has some horror flickers and delivers the fatalities we deserve. In particular, Kung Lao's (Max Huang) hat unwedges from bedrock and plants itself in the ground like a circular table saw. Earthrealm's warrior surfs the winged Nitara (Mel Jarnson) head-first into his weaponized headwear like a piece of plywood, splitting the Outworld attacker down the middle as a tidal wave of gore spreads in all directions. "Flawless victory," indeed.

7 Eye Still Need That (Queen Of Black Magic)

Investigating a bus crash, Anton (Tanta Ginting) spies the presumed Queen of Black Magic and steps backward onto a large egg — blood and insects gush from the fragments. Anton furiously itches himself as centipedes and beetle-looking creepies climb towards his face. They enter his mouth, invading all orifices until his eye pops out and the centipede scurries away. It's CGI, but Ginting's painful writhing and strenuous gurgling make the whole sequence delightfully grotesque.

8 Spare Me Killer, Though I Have Sinned (There's Someone Inside Your House)

Patrick Brice's *There's Someone Inside Your House* is a modernized slasher that gets the primality of kills right, as when hate-speaking altar girl Katie Koons (Sarah Dugdale) eats a hunting knife in church before mass. The masked killer corners Katie in a confessional booth, stabbing through flimsy wooden walls without successfully finding flesh. Katie backs against the opposite side after the knife doesn't retract. Instead, the attacker breaks through the wall behind her, slamming her mouth onto the glistening silver blade that cuts right through her throat. Blood drips out of her mouth as the camera frames her choking on the sharp object.

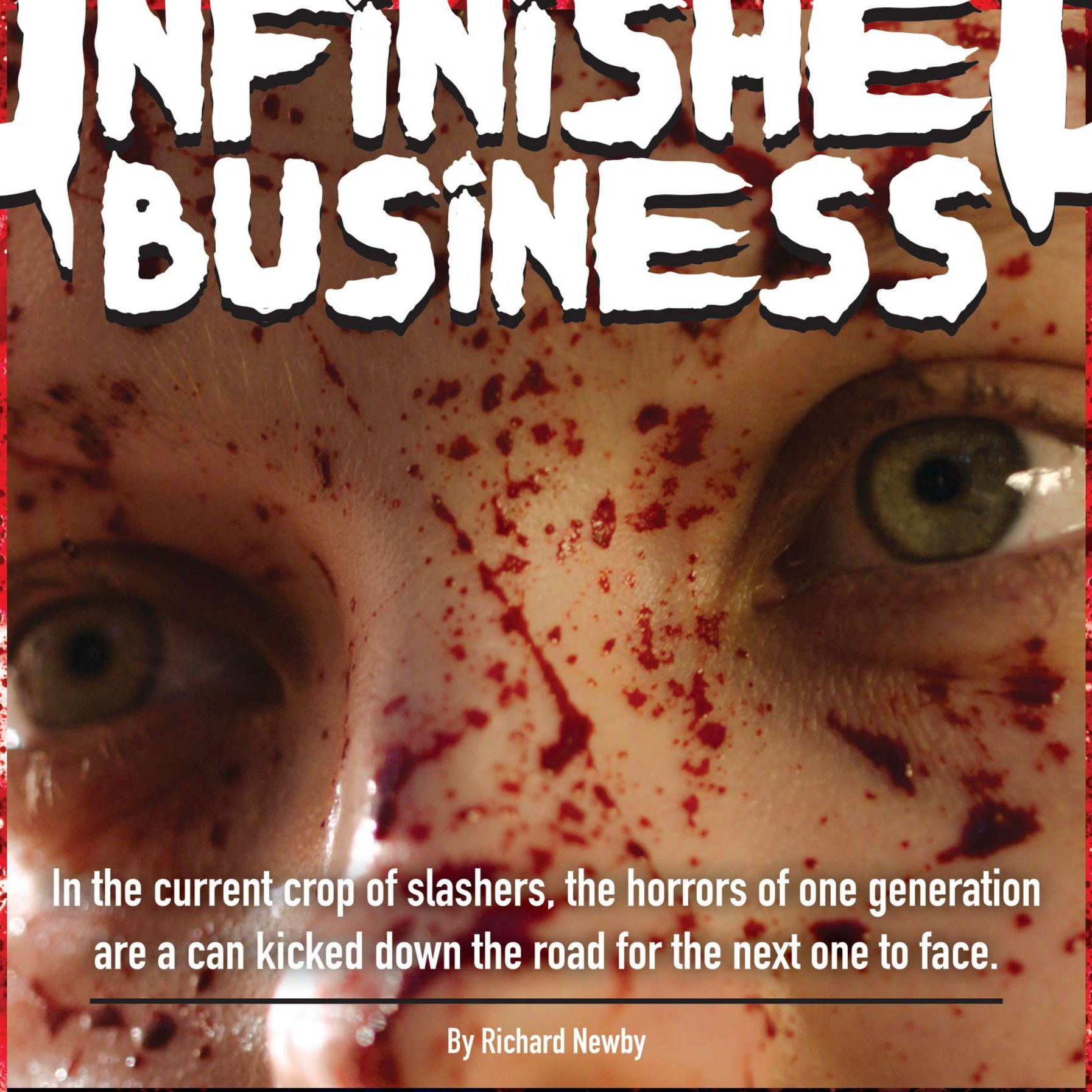
9 Jailhouse Rot (Malignant)

The prison sequence in *Malignant* finds James Wan ditching ominous haunts for berzerker destruction. As his backward-facing monstrosity tears through holding cell brawlers, limbs snap like dry twigs and pain is at a premium. Each victim earns a wince, whether an arm punches through someone's rib cage or a foot crushes someone's noggin like a rotten pomegranate. It's not conceptually complex left us feeling squeamish in its speed — especially that head squash.

10 Detective Boswick's A Piece Of Shit (Spiral: From the Book of Saw)

A return to *Saw* means a return to Jigsaw-inspired traps, which *Spiral: The Book Of Saw* executes best in its opening. Detective Boswick (Dan Petronijevic) finds himself tippy-toeing a step ladder while dangling from his tongue, clasped between an iron mechanism. Should he atone for his lies in court and sever his trapped licker, he'll dodge the oncoming train. At the last second, Boswick tears through his tongue, but it's too late. The train's conductor sees limbs and torso chunks scatter in all directions as Boswick splats like a bug against a windshield.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS



In the current crop of slashers, the horrors of one generation are a can kicked down the road for the next one to face.

By Richard Newby

You will never escape its shape, its nightmare, its scream. No matter how many times you think it's been defeated, it always comes back. Maybe it returns nastier, wears a different face or wields a different instrument of death, but the horrors of the previous generation always stalk the next. All these decades later, the question posed in the tagline of Tobe Hooper's foundational slasher still echoes: "Who will survive and what will be left of them?" We're all left at the mercy of unfinished business as the survival tactics of one generation force death upon the next.

We stand amidst a renaissance of slashers in the middle of what feels like the most tumultuous time in history. We're not the first generation to feel the oppressive weight of society, and horror has catalogued those fears from nuclear holocaust, the Vietnam war, AIDS, and satanic panic. But, it feels as if this generation might have the most fears fighting for our anxiety and attention simultaneously. Mass shootings, COVID-19, human rights abuses, police brutality, environmental catastrophes, and the soul-crushing shunting society that is the GOP. Many of the concerns of the previous generation are still present. For some, ignoring them is their only way to cope, and for others, leaving the conflict unaddressed is the only way to hold onto power.

The resurgence of slashers is not coincidental. Those who grew up with those iconic slasher monsters are now reckoning with them in their own way as filmmakers. David Gordon Green's *Halloween* and *Halloween Kills* see the daughter, Karen (Judy Greer) and granddaughter, Alyson (Andi Matichak) of Laurie Strode (Jamie Lee Curtis) reckoning not only with The Shape (James Jude Courtney), but Laurie's insistence on placing herself within this mythic narrative of good and evil, despite the fact, as *Kills* states, "it's not about [her]." The notion of the past generation seeing themselves as central, holding onto relevance, looms over Haddonfield. Don Mancini's series *Chucky* has devised new ways for Charles Lee Ray (Brad Dourif) to play "hide the soul" by taking over the body of younger hosts, and in a meta move, featuring the elder Dourif's daughter, Fiona, as one of those hosts, Nica. This lends to an exploration of age and queer identity, which was rarely at the forefront of the subgenre three decades ago. Nia DaCosta's Candyman plays its own game of soul transference, one that sees Anthony (Yahya Abdul-Mateen II), once the infant who was saved in the original film, all-grown up becoming the new *Candyman*, highlighting generational cycles of systemic abuse that lay in wait for even the most innocent of us. Still to come, there's Radio Silence's *Scream* in which the latest iteration of Ghostface is targeting the younger relatives of the original murder victims.

But today's horror has more methods of investigating sins of the past beyond revisiting its existing icons. Over the last decade we've witnessed The Other in Gregory Plotkin's *Hell Fest*, the Blissfield Butcher in Christopher Landon and Michael Kennedy's *Freaky*, and the cadre of killers introduced in Leigh Janiak's *Fear Street Trilogy*, among others. It's a challenge for any new slasher project to avoid the shadow of what's come before, yet that feels apt given we're living in the shadows of parents and grandparents and the issues they promised to solve but never did.

THE GENERATIONAL HORROR OF *FEAR STREET* SPANS CENTURIES, CULMINATING IN A BIT OF TIME TRAVEL FOR DEENA (KIANA MADEIRA).

The *Fear Street* films tackle this subject, investigating how events in 1666, 1978, and 1994 provide the answer of how one family managed to hold onto power and maintain class divisions, resulting in the systemic injustices visited upon Shadysiders. Every generation said they would change the world, solve the numerous crises that have arisen. Yet, each generation has left numerous things worse than they found it or buried it under the illusion of progress because too much of the population has given up or become complacent. Imagine if Alice (Adrienne King) in 1980's *Friday the 13th* swung once, missed, and dropped the axe in exhaustion, letting

PHOTOS: (LEFT) *THE RANGER* COURTESY NO PLACE TO PARTY LLC / (RIGHT) *FEAR STREET* - NETFLIX © 2021

Pamela continue her vengeance against young people. This feeling seems so prevalent in today's slasher cycle. I keep returning to the lyrics from Stabbing Westward's "Save Yourself." "I cannot save you. I can't even save myself. So just save yourself. I know that you've been damaged, your soul has suffered such abuse. But I am not your savior, I am just as fucked as you." This Gen X anthem, highlighting a generation's own feelings of ineffectiveness and lack of answers, featured in Jamie Blanks' *Urban Legend*, has been passed down like so much else, shifting tempo but still keeping beat as our world's problems become increasingly urgent.

Filmmaker Jenn Wexler tapped into this generational tempo with her 2018 slasher film *The Ranger*. For Wexler, slasher films were a window into a larger world that had only existed on the periphery before. She credits the '90s cycle of slasher entries like *Scream*, *I Know What You Did Last Summer* and *Urban Legend* with informing her pre-teen personality.

"The movies you watch at that time in your life are the ones that really stick with you, and in my case, showed me a darker, more mysterious part of the world was waiting for me."

Slasher movies, at their best, are about youth confronting the old – old people, old places, old values and systems. Wexler's movie sees a group of punk-rock 20-somethings on the run after attacking a cop. They find refuge in the forests of a national park. But their haven isn't so safe when a park ranger (Jeremy Holm), who shares a connection with one of the punks, Chelsea (Chloe Levine), seeks to enforce his law of the land on them with bloody results.

Holm's ranger character offers a singular personification of an oppressive government, backed by the idea that only certain people belong in certain spaces. The young are viewed as trespassers, which feels very much in tune with reality. Too many above a certain age aren't concerned with the world they'll leave behind. The world, these spaces, only exist for their benefit in the present. The notion of young adults and teenagers being trespassers goes all the way back to *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, notable in the fact there's no masked killer invading suburbia and private spaces, but a family whose home was invaded by teenagers. That's not to say the Sawyers were justified, but it's worth highlighting the difference between private property and a public space in the evolution of slashers from *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* to *The Ranger*. While Hooper's film serves as a metaphor for the Vietnam War, Wexler's film wrestles with the battleground of shared spaces. Does America belong to the future or the past?

"Since 2016, when Trump took office, there's been a shift where we as a society are very vocal in terms of grappling with what happened and this clashing of generations," Wexler says. "We're looking at the older generation and wondering 'what did you do to land us where we are right now?'" Though written with her co-writer Giaco Furino before Trump took office and the #MeToo Movement of 2017, Wexler admitted there may have been some osmosis in terms of what happens in *The Ranger* relating to what happened in America. "[The Ranger] is someone who deeply wants to be respected. He wears a uniform, so he feels he deserves respect. He resents a world that doesn't respect him. To me, that spoke so well to this white, toxic, patriarchal issue of 'I exist, and I am who I am and therefore I deserve respect. But at the same time, I don't have to respect others.'"

The generational clash between Chelsea and The Ranger is something that stretches beyond political

THE RANGER: CHLOË LEVINE AND JEREMY HOLM EXPLORE THE VIOLENT RAGE FELT BY A GENERATION FACING ITS OWN OBSOLESCENCE.

divisions and toxic masculinity. "I was really basing it on my own experiences of being a young woman trying to figure myself out while dealing with the expectations some older people in my life, some of my mentors, had for me and bumping up against some of those expectations. I funneled those anxieties into Chelsea." The Ranger wants to make Chelsea like him, a figurative version of "hide the soul" by trying to force her to follow his set of rules, the rules of the park, "Take nothing but pictures. Leave nothing but footprints." Within that is the demand the younger generation not leave any mark on the world, the implication being the world doesn't belong to them.

We're asked to understand the circumstances that create victims, and even mourn them, in a way that adds cultural significance to what Roger Ebert called "dead teenager movies."

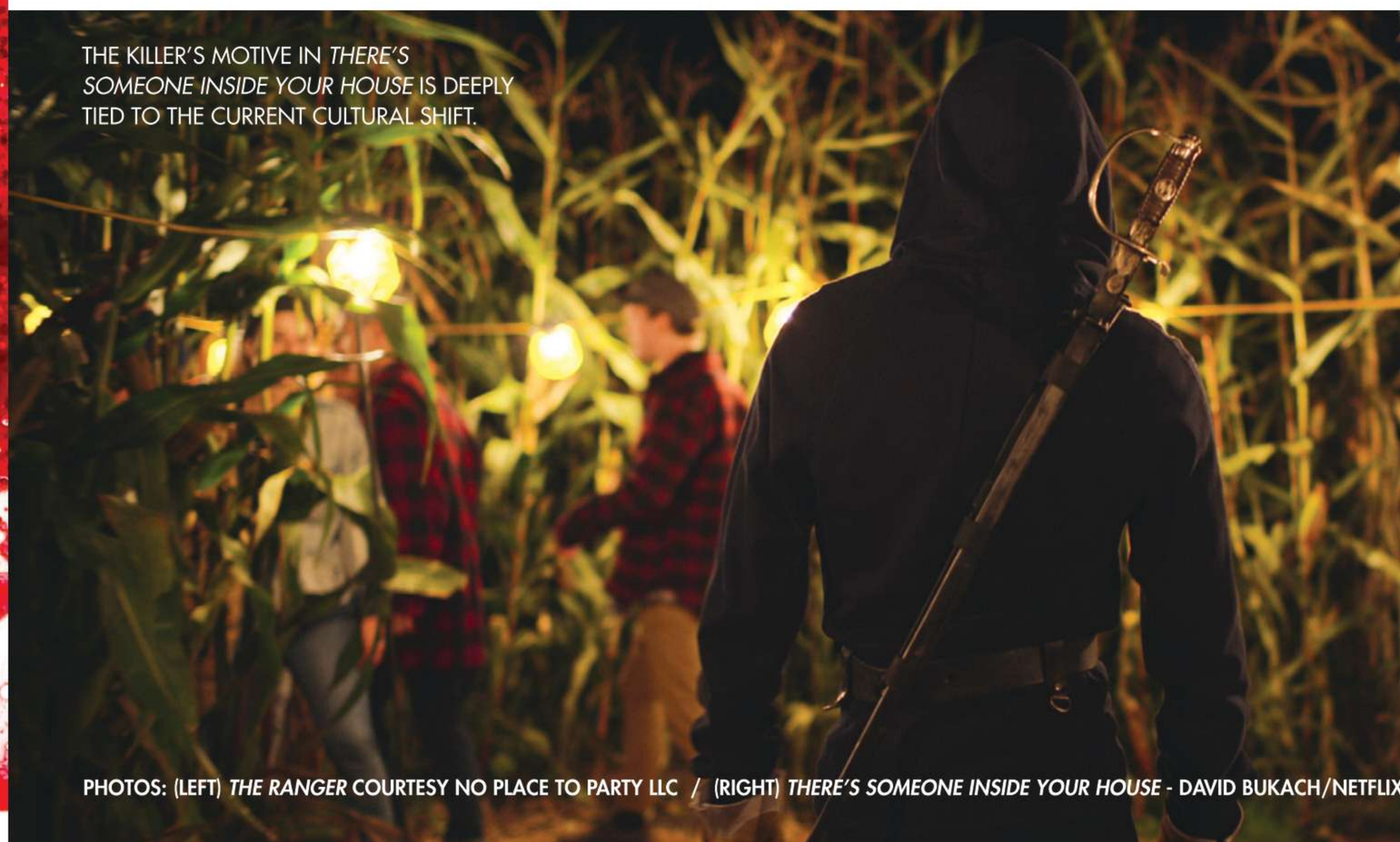
In that desire to make Chelsea like him, there is the issue of The Ranger seeking a form of immortality. Wexler cites this as a case of "forcing the next generation to conform to your ideas and beliefs instead of letting them be their own people. I do believe there is a fear of mortality in that." Wexler reflects on her own status on the generational stage, which has proven fertile ground for the current crop of slasher creators. "As a millennial I'm aware that when we were in our 20s the headlines were frequently 'millennials are ruining everything.' And now it's 'here's what Gen Z thinks of your side part' or whatever. There's so much fear and distrust of the next generation that's coming up and it's humans fearing that as they get older, they're no longer the exciting people they once were and, in a way, you're forced to face your own mortality."

This is also a fitting response to those holding onto the idea horror was better in their day while admonishing the cultural shifts of a new generation's perspective being reflected in the genre.

On the other side of *The Ranger*'s punk consideration and "fuck the police" energy sits Patrick Brice's *There's Someone Inside Your House*, in which the central killer, part of Gen Z, embraces the tactics of an older generation under the guise of rebellion. It would be dishonest to suggest the generational division we're currently reckoning with, particularly considering the past four years, all comes down to older people. There are also those of the younger generation who have become tools of the old regime, taking the insecurity of their elders, and making it their own.

In *There's Someone Inside Your House*, a killer who wears the masks of his victims' faces targets a graduating class of high schoolers in a small Midwest town, exposing their secrets and supposed hypocrisies. "I loved the idea of a killer driven by white privilege who also sees himself as a victim. I'd never seen a horror movie that reckoned with that material in this way," says Patrick Brice, who directed the film from Henry Gayden's screenplay, based on the novel of the same name by Stephanie Perkins. Brice admitted that he was surprised by some of the backlash over the film. Many of the complaints he's received accused him of "going woke," and making white men the enemy. He laughs it off, "Have they seen *Creep* and *Creep 2*?"

Brice is navigating a generational battle on two fronts, the one that happens in the film and the one



THE KILLER'S MOTIVE IN *THERE'S SOMEONE INSIDE YOUR HOUSE* IS DEEPLY TIED TO THE CURRENT CULTURAL SHIFT.

PHOTOS: (LEFT) *THE RANGER* COURTESY NO PLACE TO PARTY LLC / (RIGHT) *THERE'S SOMEONE INSIDE YOUR HOUSE* - DAVID BUKACH/NETFLIX

happening in his Twitter DMs. Both are coming from the same place – people who desperately want relevance and to cement their footprints unto a land in which they are no longer the majority. Too many white men believe themselves to be an institution and the center of things. And when they're told they're not then we frequently see this shift happen where they retreat to tactics of racism, classism, and queerphobia that benefited their population in the past. To quote the tagline of 2011's *Scream 4*, "new decade, new rules," and there's a lot of folks who can't handle it. Some take to social media, some run for office, and others, as in the case of Brice's film, pick up a blade.

In *There's Someone Inside Your House*, the fear of cancelation and confusion over identity without labels manifests itself as a means to cancel others, socially and mortally. "Part of what a lot of folks are dealing with right now is the loss of white identity. When that pendulum swings to the right, politically, it's people trying to hold onto some semblance of traditional American white culture. When folks see special attention given to people who for thousands and thousands of years have not been given that attention there's this reaction of 'oh, well I need that too,'" Brice says. This neediness shows up in a lot of ways, from white people appropriating POC culture to them clinging to the relics of generations past.

A facet in Brice's film is the overall lack of parents. Teenagers are left to deal with their parents' mistakes, without their ability to provide context. "In each generation there's been an evolution in emotional language that allows the current generation to deal with the inherited pain," Brice says. "The baby boomers had a tough time because they came from a generation of parents that lived through a great depression and multiple world wars and not knowing how to talk about their feelings. The baby boomers had a full-on rejection of that as adults, but then it resulted in it coming from a selfish and immature place. After the hippies it swung right back again to Reaganism and materialism."

A lack of empathy is the root of so many current battles, so empathy becomes the strongest weapon against evil.

When asked about how generational pain manifests in his film, Brice says, "The kids in this film are all dealing with the inherited pain of the previous generation. Zach's (Dale Whibley) dad's Nazi memorabilia collection is a physical manifestation of that pain, and it lives in his house in a display case." The Nazi memorabilia, which Zach makes into bongs for his friends, and as we (spoiler) learn later, weapons for his murders, is simultaneously part of a revolution and simply another way to hold onto the legacy of evil. As a result, Zach finds himself torn between generations, lashing out at his peers and his father, and belonging to nothing, faceless and lacking an identity.

A lack of empathy is the root of so many current battles, so empathy becomes the strongest weapon against evil. Brice says this factor drew him to the project, citing the moment where Makani (Sydney Park) and her friends mourn the friends they lost. Similarly, in *The Ranger*, Chelsea's Uncle Pete (Larry Fessenden) is this guiding spirit that connects her to the forest and grounds her in a way The Ranger can never feel. We're asked to understand the circumstances that create victims, and even mourn them, in a way that adds cultural significance to what Roger Ebert called "dead teenager movies."

Yes, slasher movies are often defined by bloodshed and body counts, but it's evident our slashers are finding the value in the current generation's fight for social justice. We may not be able to escape the past, or the wrath of previous generations, but at least we can bear the scars and losses as evidence we didn't give up and stop swinging. If that's not enough for us to escape on, maybe it will at least give us a head start. 💀

SPOILER ON EXACTLY WHO IS *INSIDE YOUR HOUSE*.

PHOTO: DAVID BUKACH/NETFLIX

FANGORIA COLORS

OF THE DARK

LISTEN NOW

JOIN HOSTS DR. REBEKAH MCKENDRY (PROFESSOR, FANGORIA, WRITER-DIRECTOR)
AND ELRIC KANE (PROFESSOR, PURE CINEMA PODCAST, FILMMAKER)
AS THEY TAKE A DEEP LOOK AT THE HORROR GENRE.

Each show explores a specific part of horror history, key players, franchises, deep cut titles,
important films, and interviews with some of the genres' biggest icons.

STITCHER

Listen on Apple Podcasts

Spotify®

A NEW STAB AT SCREAM

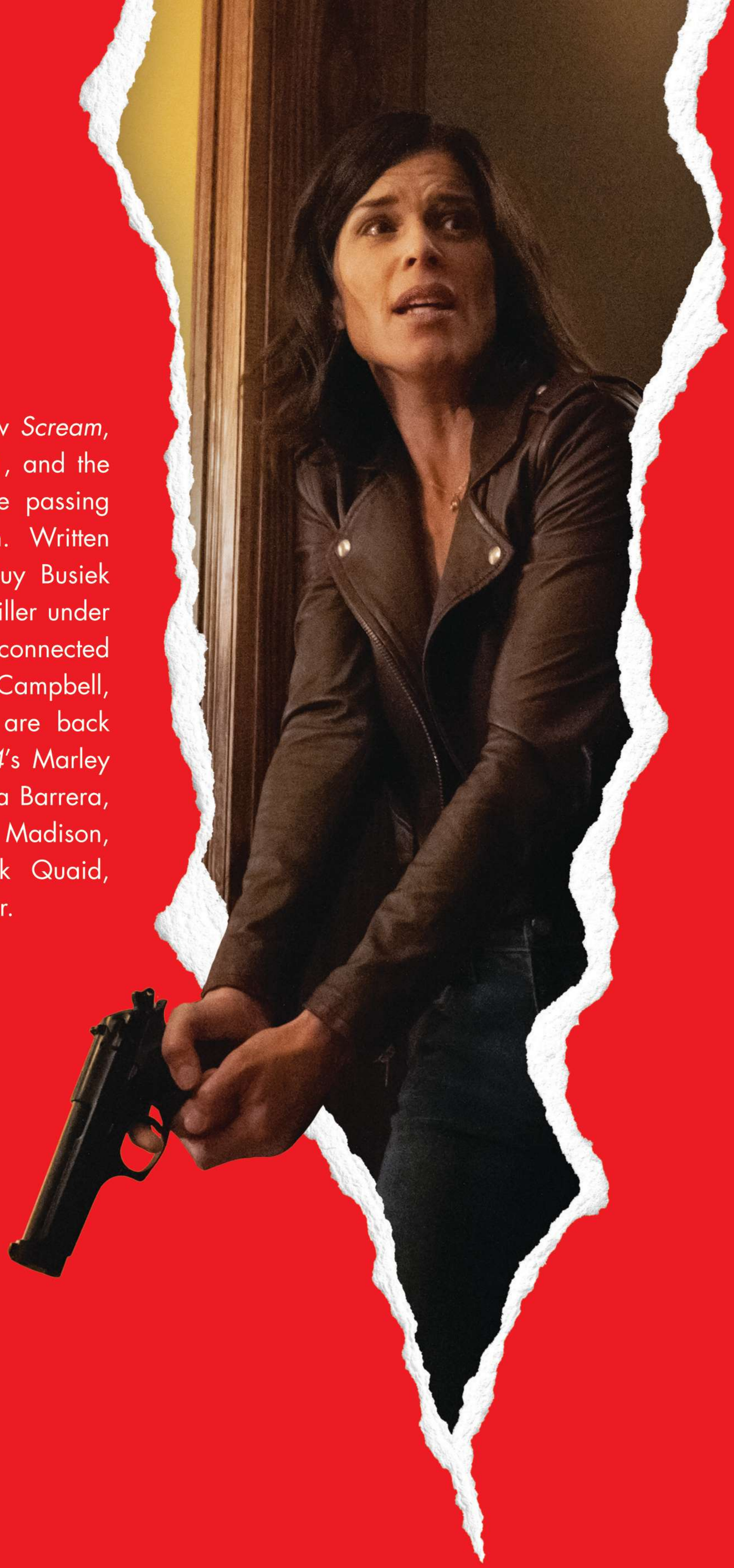
WITH

KEVIN WILLIAMSON, TYLER GILLETT, MATT BETTINELLI-OLPIN, AND CHAD VILLELLA

This year will see the release of a new *Scream*, the first entry in the series since 2011, and the first such big-screen venture since the passing of the series' director, Wes Craven. Written by James Vanderbilt (*Zodiac*) and Guy Busiek (*Ready or Not*), the film finds a new killer under the Ghostface mask, targeting teens connected to Woodsboro's bloody past. Neve Campbell, Courteney Cox and David Arquette are back in their iconic roles, joining *Scream 4*'s Marley Shelton and new cast members Melissa Barrera, Kyle Gallner, Mason Gooding, Mikey Madison, Dylan Minnette, Jenna Ortega, Jack Quaid, Jasmin Savoy Brown, and Sonia Ammar.

As Tyler Gillett, Matt Bettinelli-Olpin, and Chad Villella (the filmmaking team known collectively as Radio Silence) stared down the barrel of the project, they wondered whether their voice would be accepted into the franchise's canon by audiences and fans, but one seal of approval carried more weight than any: *Scream* creator Kevin Williamson.

FANGORIA is pleased to present a conversation between Messrs. Bettinelli-Olpin, Gillett, Villella and Williamson about *Scream* as a beloved property, pop culture institution, and altogether intimidating gig.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF PARAMOUNT STUDIOS

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

CHAD VILLELLA: The reactions to the title have been interesting. I know back in the day, Kevin, you guys struggled with the title.

KEVIN WILLIAMSON: I think Harvey Weinstein actually named the movie *Scream*. I think it was his idea. And we all hated it and fought it and fought it and fought it. Neve (Campbell) was calling, so upset she's ready to cry. She said, "You can't name it *Scream*. That's just a horror movie title. (The original title) *Scary Movie* is why I wanted to do the movie." And I remember we had this whole discussion about it. And I was on her side. We were all against the title pretty much. And then we all shut up real fast.

TYLER GILLETT: Did it ever grow on you? Or was it something you always hated until it was released?

KW: Well, after you just say it over and over and over again, it just grows on you. You can't imagine it being anything else. So it taught me that you just have to be open to things. And that's on every single thing I'd ever done. I remember when we were doing *Dawson's Creek*, the network said, "Well, we've got to change the title." All through the making of the pilot. "We're going to change the title." And they kept trying to change the title, and nothing sounded okay. And then they ended up going with *Dawson's Creek*, thinking it was the worst title ever.

TG: *Ready or Not* was a working title until something better came along. And we just got deep enough into the process that we realized, "it's on everything."

MATT BETTINELLI-OLPIN: We kept getting lists from the studio saying, "Here are a whole bunch of names to try."

CV: And we kept saying no. The original script title was *Family Ritual* for a long time. And then we ended up putting it on the board games that you see at the beginning. So you see Family Ritual. So those are all the little easter eggs from the origin of the project.

KW: I've decided now everything is titled *The Untitled Kevin Williamson Project*. But *Scream*... yeah. It turned out okay. I hate to tell that story now because I love the title now.

MBO: Was the line, "It's gonna be a scream!" put in after you guys changed the title or before?

KW: It was in the script.

TG: I love how all of the things that have become so mythologized for us, when you trace them back to the moment of inception, it's always just people making a thing and trying their best to figure it out.

KW: Or people look for hidden meanings. And they'll go, "Oh, that was so clever the way that you planted this, and it was a reference to this." And then you say, "No, that was just art by accident. Sorry. That had actually no greater meaning whatsoever. That was just us on the run."

CHAD VILLELLA, MATT BETTINELLI-OLPIN, (REDACTED), TYLER GILLETT, WILLIAM SHERAK AND KEVIN WILLIAMSON SLATE A BRAND-NEW *SCREAM*.

PHOTO COURTESY OF PARAMOUNT STUDIOS / PHOTO BY BROWNIE HARRIS

TARA (JENNA ORTEGA) ANSWERING A LANDLINE? IN A *SCREAM* MOVIE?? BIG NO-NO.

PHOTO COURTESY OF PARAMOUNT STUDIOS / PHOTO BY BROWNIE HARRIS

HELLO

A SCARY PHONE CALL

TG: I'm curious, Kevin: what was the feeling when Jaime (co-writer/producer James Vanderbilt) called you and said, "Hey, we want to bring this thing that you created back into the world." It's been 11 years since *Scream 4*.

KW: It was a big no. I didn't want anything to do with it in the beginning. At first, I toyed with the idea of being involved, and I just didn't want to be, honestly, without Wes around. And I didn't care who was doing it. And so, therefore, it was a big fat no. My heart wasn't really in it because… I don't know. It just seemed weird to do anything.

TG: Yeah. It's complicated.

KW: It was very complicated. And I just put it aside, and didn't even deal with the emotions that it was bringing up. I just said no. And I kept saying no. And one day I just had this revelation: "Do you really want *Scream* to happen without you? Do you really want there to be another *Scream* in the universe, and you weren't part of it?" And I thought about it, and the answer was, "no, I don't."

So I called Jaime back and said, "Is the offer still open? Can I still be a part of it?" And he said "absolutely." And I had one condition, that the film be dedicated to Wes. And I said, "Can we do that please?" And he just said, "Absolutely!" And then I was in, and it didn't matter. I didn't even care about the deal or anything. I was in; "Yes. Yes, I'd like to be a part of it." And so it was the easiest deal they ever made. I was just, "Yes, yes, and yes."

TG: Incredible.

CV: Just so you know, that was a big part of our involvement, when Jaime told us that you were on board. That was when we felt, "Okay, then we know this is going to be another line in the chapter of the *Scream* saga that does it justice." That was a very, very big part of it.

KW: And for the longest time, no one would confirm to me that you guys were directing. I knew you guys were, but they wouldn't confirm it.

TG: Well, we had another movie going when Jaime and (producers) Paul Neinstein and William Sherak came to us to read the script. We were in that stage of navigating two things that were colliding. And knowing that you were involved, Kevin, we just said, "Oh, well we have to do *Scream*."

KW: I was hoping you were because I had seen *Ready or Not*. And I was more excited about you guys directing than anything because that was such a crazy, fun movie. And it's hard to really be seen and make noise in the space of horror. And *Ready or Not* really did it in a big way. And I loved it. And so you guys were such a selling point for me. It just made sense, for you guys to direct it. So I'm thrilled the way it came together.

MBO: I remember reading the script for the first time, and it was the three of us in a room. And we all turned to each other halfway through, and we went, "We have to do this. This is incredible."

TG: "Unless this goes off the rails in the next 50 pages." Yeah. There's no way to not make this movie.

TG: It also had that *thing*, and I think this is what you were saying earlier, Kevin: how do you make a movie that's going to cut through the noise and feel like it belongs in a theater, and it feels like something that should be, and deserves to be, a conversation piece. I think we just had that feeling, and I'm not sure. It's a ton of different ingredients that come together to give you the intuition of what that is.

But honestly, as we were reading it our reaction was, "Oh, I can't wait for people to have the experience of watching this story." It didn't feel disposable. It felt scary. It's funny. And there are important things that are being said. It felt important, but not self-important, which is a hard thing to find.

KW: Particularly with *Scream*, I think, because you don't have a Michael Myers, and you don't have a Jason Voorhees. It's a mystery. There's a new killer every installment. And so it all comes down to the motive. *Scream* lives in a pop culture, deconstructed space. The motive is typically relevant to whatever the times are.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF PARAMOUNT STUDIOS / PHOTO BY BROWNIE HARRIS

FRIENDSHIP GOALS: SIDNEY (NEVE CAMPBELL) AND GALE (COURTNEY COX)

GETTING NEVE, AND GETTING IT RIGHT

KW: What I love so much about the new movie, when you're watching it, it evokes an emotional experience because it plays on anyone who loved the first film, which I certainly did. I had an emotional experience watching it, like when Sidney shows up for the first time, you gasp a little bit. She turns to camera and I gasped a little bit the first time I watched this movie because it just takes you back. And you go, "oh my God, Sidney's back." And she has the perfect entrance, and it's such a beautiful moment. And the movie's full of that, in addition to staying true to the genre and the scares and the whodunit of it all. And all the new characters; the casting was phenomenal.

TG: Yeah. I loved them so damn much.

CV: Incredible.

DAVID ARQUETTE RETURNS AS DEWEY. PHEW.

"When Sidney shows up for the first time, you gasp a little bit. She turns to camera and I gasped a little bit the first time I watched this movie because it just takes you back."

MBO: Rich Delia, our casting director, just has such an eye. He brought us all those people. Mason Gooding didn't even audition.

CV: No, we just had a Zoom. A conversation with him that was about an hour, an hour and a half. And we just liked his vibe.

TG: And way early too. The movie was supposed to go into production in March. Yeah. So these were long before we actually would set foot in Wilmington. We were Zooming, the casting process was going, and then things just kept getting pushed back. And yeah, he was a very early Zoom and his energy stuck with us for months.

MBO: I remember Jenna (Ortega) was convinced that she didn't get the part because she auditioned in March and then just never heard anything. So then we called her again in August and she was thrilled. And she said, "oh, great, it's my favorite movie and I was so excited that I might be in it, and then bummer." And then fast forward six months and she's got the part.

KW: I love her so much. I would kill to work with her. I think she is a terrific talent. I think her star is really bright and I can't wait to see what happens to her as an actress because I think she's amazing.

CV: I couldn't agree more and couldn't recommend her more. She's just incredible.

TG: In an early conversation we had with Neve, she said really plainly, "just cast people who are brave. Cast people who were not afraid to make the weird, crazy choice." She said "that's why people feel so connected to the first movie, is that energy. Why that friend group is so memorable; it's just the way the actors just fearlessly threw themselves into those roles." And it was really good advice.

KW: I'm so excited that Neve came back. That was the one… my fingers were crossed. I implored them; "please get Neve." And I remember talking to her when you guys were talking to her, she called me and she wanted to know what I thought and I told her the same thing I said to you, which is I just can't imagine the movie happening without her.

TG: Right; we wrote her a letter that expressed our admiration for her and Wes' work, and how influential the *Scream* movies are to us. And to let her know our intention, which was to make a love letter to all things *Scream*.

KW: I'm glad that you guys wrote that letter. I think that was the deciding factor of all of it, for her.

MBO: We were white-knuckling it there for a minute.

CV: Yeah. Definitely.

MBO: The three of us kept having conversations, kind of off the grid. There had been conversations above our pay grade about "what if Neve doesn't come back? How do we deal with that?" But for the three of us it was like, "we can't make this movie without Neve Campbell."

CV: Right. No question.

MBO: And again, it's a testament to what you guys created with the first one, where you feel the love in that movie. You just feel it, it comes through the screen and that's what we wanted on this.

KW: And I saw that. I noticed that when we were standing on the set and we took a group picture on the stairs. I saw their interaction and I thought, "okay, they're all hanging out. They're all friends. They all love each other. This is cool."

CV: One of the biggest bonding moments was Halloween weekend, two years ago during filming, we did a screening of the original *Scream* on Stage 10 in front of the house. It was one of those moments we just will never forget. And I think that the cast really appreciated how special everything was, and what was actually going on in Wilmington at that time and what we were all making together.

GROWING PAINS AND PASSING TORCHES

KW: Is this the biggest budget you've worked with?

MBO: Yeah. By a lot.

KW: And how was it different from your earlier films, doing everything yourself?

MBO: Not that different. We have a vibe that we like to create, kind of like a band. And we all play a different instrument, but we play the music together. We love that scrappy feel that we had when we were making things for no money on weekends, and they've always let us keep that. It's something that the three of us don't want to lose. It's so valuable. And I think the biggest change for us in the process has just been the things that we're not good at, we now get people who are very talented to do those things. I think the thing at the end of the day that we always go back to is "how would we have done this 10 years ago?" Keep that DIY ethic alive.

TG: And invite people in. None of us will be afraid to say "I don't know if I have the right answer." And for us, that's a really important part of actually being a good director, is being able to invite people into the process in a way that's actually valuable and isn't about pride or ego, but it's about, like you said, creating a community that has the same focus and the same goal, which is ultimately to make something that we all love and can be excited about.

KW: Not to bring it down, but my father died during the course of you guys shooting this film. And you guys sent the most ridiculous amount of food. I mean, we ate for days on what you sent. And my family was blown away by the gesture.

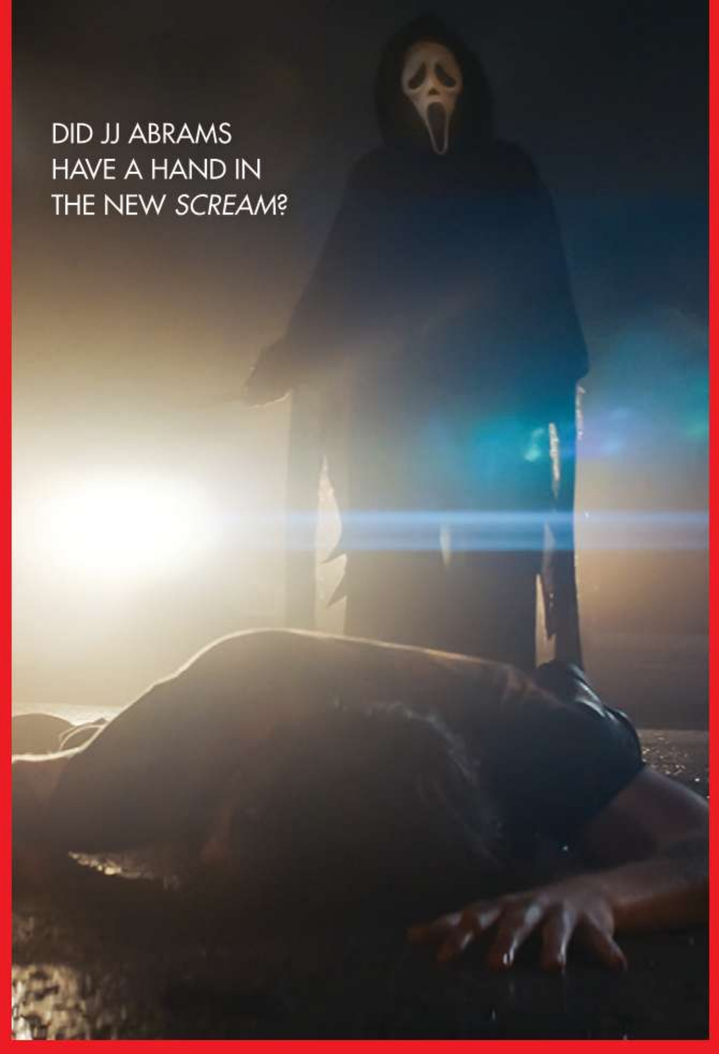
And it reminded me, that kindness and thoughtfulness… that's the kind of stuff that happened on the first movie. I think Wes would be thrilled to have you guys on board, because I feel like you guys speak his language; clearly it's in your DNA. And the other thing, of course, is it all turned out really well. I think he'd be very happy with this film. I think he'd be smiling from ear to ear.

TG: That is the highest compliment you could give; it truly is. We've had this amazing experience of getting to know him through all the people whose lives he touched and changed along the way. And now of course, this life- changing experience we've had of getting to walk his path for a minute; it's been really, really special.

KW: He was a great guy and I didn't even realize the impact that his passing would have on me. It snuck up on me, and I think about him every day of my life. That's what an impact he had on my life, my career, my birth into Hollywood. I know there's so many people that I'm grateful for who helped get my career kick-started, but there's no way of talking about my early days and not putting him front and center.

AND SCREAM AGAIN

DID JJ ABRAMS HAVE A HAND IN THE NEW *SCREAM*?



PHOTOS COURTESY OF PARAMOUNT STUDIOS

KW: What's next for you guys? Can you talk about it?

CV: No.

TG: You know how it goes, Kevin, the thing that you think you're going to do next is never the thing that you're going to do next. But hopefully, another one of these. I think for us that's the gas in the tank right now. Let's get back on set with this cast and tell another one of these incredible stories.

MBO: I just want to know what the next one's going to be called.

CV: Yeah, that's really tricky now.

TG: Yeah. We didn't do ourselves any favor in the naming scheme. Can it just be *The Untitled Kevin Williamson Project*? 💀

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

THE *SCREAM* 2022 FAMILY PHOTO.

PHOTO COURTESY OF PARAMOUNT STUDIOS / PHOTO BY BROWNIE HARRIS

THE SCREAM LEGACY

By Brian Collins

Illustration by Spicy Donut

Halloween Kills has been doing just fine at the box office, all things considered (Peacock, Covid, etc.), but even though I had already seen it at a festival, I bought tickets for opening night to show my support. And I'm glad I did, because something interesting happened beforehand during the trailer reel: we were treated to a look at a new Scream movie.

Due to the timing of these two franchises' releases, this has never been possible before, nor has any Scream movie had a Halloween film to promote beforehand in turn. Even when they were both at the same studio (Dimension), it just never worked out that way.

FOUR SEQUELS AND 25 YEARS LATER, IT'S NO LONGER THE NEW KID ON THE BLOCK PAYING TRIBUTE TO ITS PREDECESSORS.

Wes Craven's *Scream* began as a love letter to the slasher subgenre that *Halloween* more or less kicked off (we don't need to get pedantic for the sake of the sentiment; no one's forgetting Bob Clark.) That subgenre had been largely abandoned thanks to, well, Craven's own *Nightmare on Elm Street*, which shifted the body count flick into more supernatural territory and left ordinary masked men largely in the dust. At the time of *Scream*'s release in December of 1996, it was the first original, old-school slasher movie to hit multiplexes in years, with only a handful of supernaturally charged — and unsuccessful — sequels from the old guard (Michael, Jason, etc) in between.

Now, four sequels and 25 years later, it's no longer the new kid on the block paying tribute to its predecessors. It fully clicked when I saw a trailer for one attached to the other: *Scream* has now become part of that same legacy.

As an OG fan, it is such a delightful surprise to see how the film has stood the test of time, and that people half my age are just as excited about the new installment. Horror was as dead as a genre could be in the mid '90s, and *Scream* could have very well ended up being as all-but-forgotten as the college slashers Randy rattles off in its first sequel. But thankfully, after a ho-hum opening, word of mouth about this clever, scary film spread, and it became a massive hit.

Unlike some horror titles that genre mainstays such as myself rally behind, *Scream* was an easy sell to mainstream audiences. It helps that it was legitimately great entertainment. Kevin Williamson's script was the source of an all-out bidding war between the studios, something that probably had never happened before (or since?) for a movie about a guy in a mask killing horny teens. Let's not forget, Paramount Pictures was borderline embarrassed by the success of the *Friday the 13th* films that bore their logo, and even Carpenter's *Halloween* was rejected by the major studios, all of whom were quick to snatch up independently made ripoffs a couple of years later. That level of quality, along with what turned out to be a smart counter-programming release date around the holidays, allowed the film to strike a chord for younger audiences who, for the most part, had never really seen that kind of horror mystery before.

Not in theaters, at least.

At that time, the most recent entries in the boogeymen's respective franchises were *Jason Goes To Hell: The Final Friday*, *Wes Craven's New Nightmare*, *Halloween: The Curse of Michael Myers*, and *Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Next Generation*. Rather, the entries that were either failed attempts at reviving brands that already had their time in the sun, or attempts to finish them off for good.

Sure, the kids might have caught one of the older *Friday the 13th*s or something on TV, maybe even rented *Prom Night* at a sleepover, but those were, for lack of a better word, "old" movies. My peers and I didn't get to watch *Halloween* without knowing the brother twist that the sequels brought into it. We were confused when we watched the original *Friday the 13th* and didn't see a hockey mask. Getting to see something of this nature without its subsequent legacy attached to it was just not in the cards for anyone in my generation. We were always going back to these films, not getting in on the ground level.

Scream gave us that blank slate, and then some. Its out-of-nowhere success prompted a quick sequel, of course, but also allowed Williamson to finally sell an older script that had

previously been rejected. His *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (based on Lois Duncan's less violent novel) was a throwback to the kind of films *Scream* was commenting on, making it no surprise when Sony marketed it around his name as opposed to its plot or characters. But when that film was also a huge hit, the floodgates were opened. It got its own sequels, close cousins like *Urban Legend* and *Valentine* came along, Chucky and Michael Myers were revived with a similar winky attitude (see: *Bride of Chucky*'s evidence room gags and *Halloween: H20*'s mind-fuck where the characters are watching *Scream 2*), and the DTV market was again flooded with cheap knockoffs. Raise your hand if you rented *Bloody Murder*!

But it was Ghostface that lived on while the Fisherman, and the Cherub, for example, faded into obscurity. If a poster came out today with the fencing mask from *Urban Legends: Final Cut* and nothing else, very few would know what it was supposed to be promoting. Hell, audiences in 2000 were kind of confused — the first film's killer had a parka.

Thanks in part to the quality control the *Scream* series was afforded over the years, that iconic visage has that same kind of instant recognition afforded to Jason's hockey mask or Freddy's glove; one doesn't need to know who Cotton Weary or Kirby Reed is to quickly understand that seeing the Edvard Munch-inspired face in a theater lobby means a new *Scream* is coming. In less than half as many films as any of his predecessors, Ghostface has become part of their club, fending off rivals and even inspiring his own throwback homages; the recent *Fear Street: 1994* was the product of someone who grew up with the film and wanted to give it its due, just as Williamson repeatedly showed off his love for *Halloween* and *Friday the 13th*.

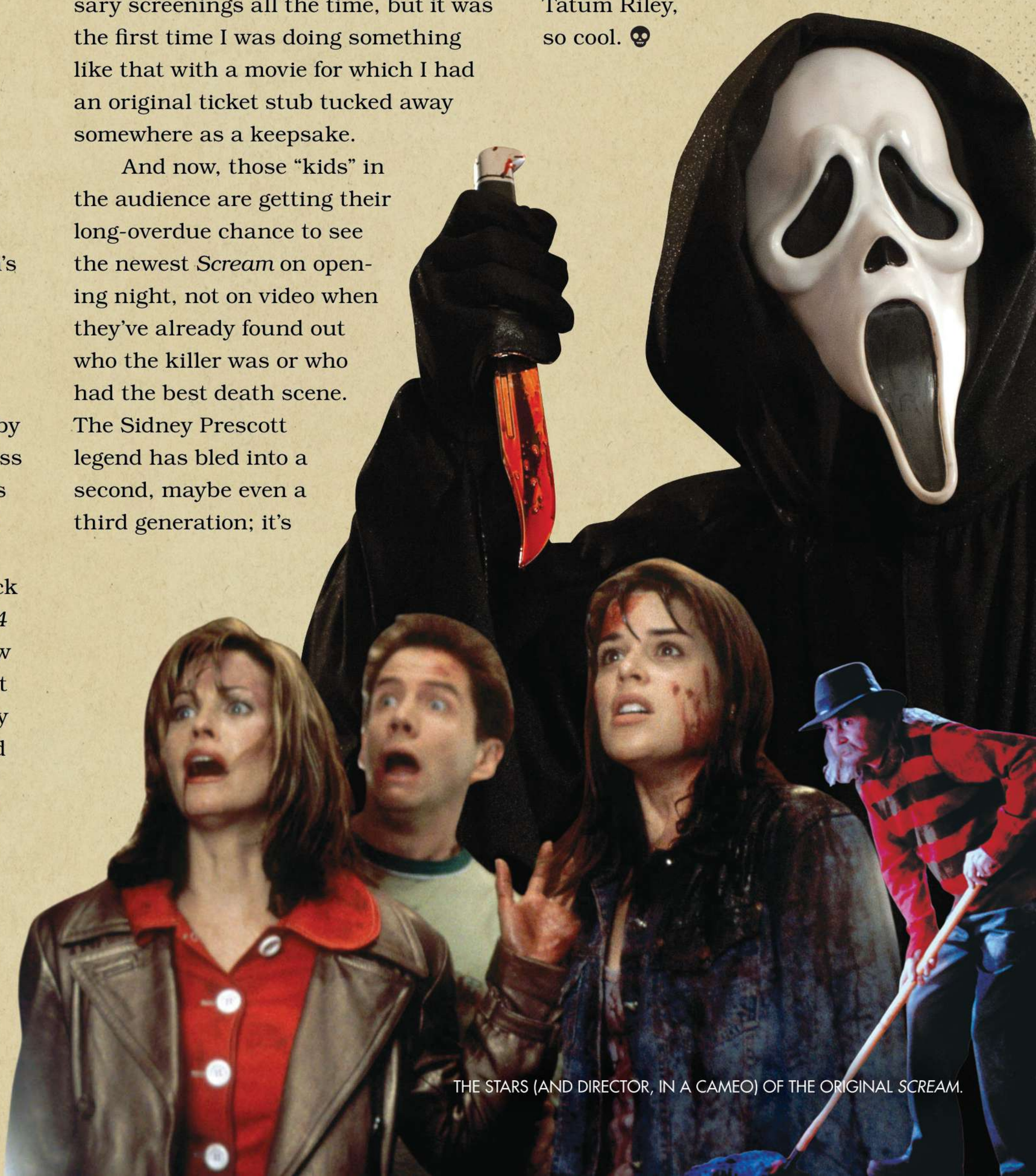
Now our clumsiest killer is back for the first time in over a decade, and I tell you… it is somewhat weird, but sweet and delightful, to be the old man this time around. *Scream* is now over 25 years old, which means it dates further back than most of the "vintage" films it was referencing at the time, a fun little bit of bar trivia that also speaks to how much of a legacy it has, even if original fans like myself still occasionally think of it as the newcomer.

Over the summer, I attended a 35mm marathon of all four films, and it was a mild shock to the system to see so many younger audience members who knew them by heart but never got to watch any of them in a theater before. I remember the first time I got to see *Halloween* '78 in a theater and how excited I was to experience the film in a new way after a million viewings. Now, I'm reliving my own memories of *Scream*'s opening weekend in 1996 while surrounded by people who weren't even born yet. They knew all the lines and clapped for all the right moments ("I'll send you a copy!" still kills), but it was their first time having that experience of watching it with 200 others, which as any repertory viewing fan knows is akin to a religious experience when it happens for a film you've only ever seen at home. I go to (or host) anniversary screenings all the time, but it was the first time I was doing something like that with a movie for which I had an original ticket stub tucked away somewhere as a keepsake.

And now, those "kids" in the audience are getting their long-overdue chance to see the newest *Scream* on opening night, not on video when they've already found out who the killer was or who had the best death scene. The Sidney Prescott legend has bled into a second, maybe even a third generation; it's possible — hell, almost certain — that there will be parents my age or older taking their tweens to see it as a bonding experience, just as a good friend of mine took his (now college-aged) son to his first big-screen *Friday the 13th* when the 2009 remake came along.

When I tweet my theories about Dewey's fate in *Scream* '22 (my guess? RIP, pal), the people arguing or agreeing with me aren't just my fellow "Olds" who were choking up and applauding when we learned in *Scream 2* that he had survived once again. The younger crowds are just as invested in his fate. And when I take a step back and consider that legacy and how long it has maintained its hold on horror fans, it's one of the few "I'm old" realizations that make me smile.

I got to watch an icon come into their own in real time, and — without even fully realizing it until that trailer was attached to The Shape's latest misadventure — see him take his deserved seat at the head table. That is, in the words of the late Tatum Riley, so cool. 💀



THE STARS (AND DIRECTOR, IN A CAMEO) OF THE ORIGINAL *SCREAM*.

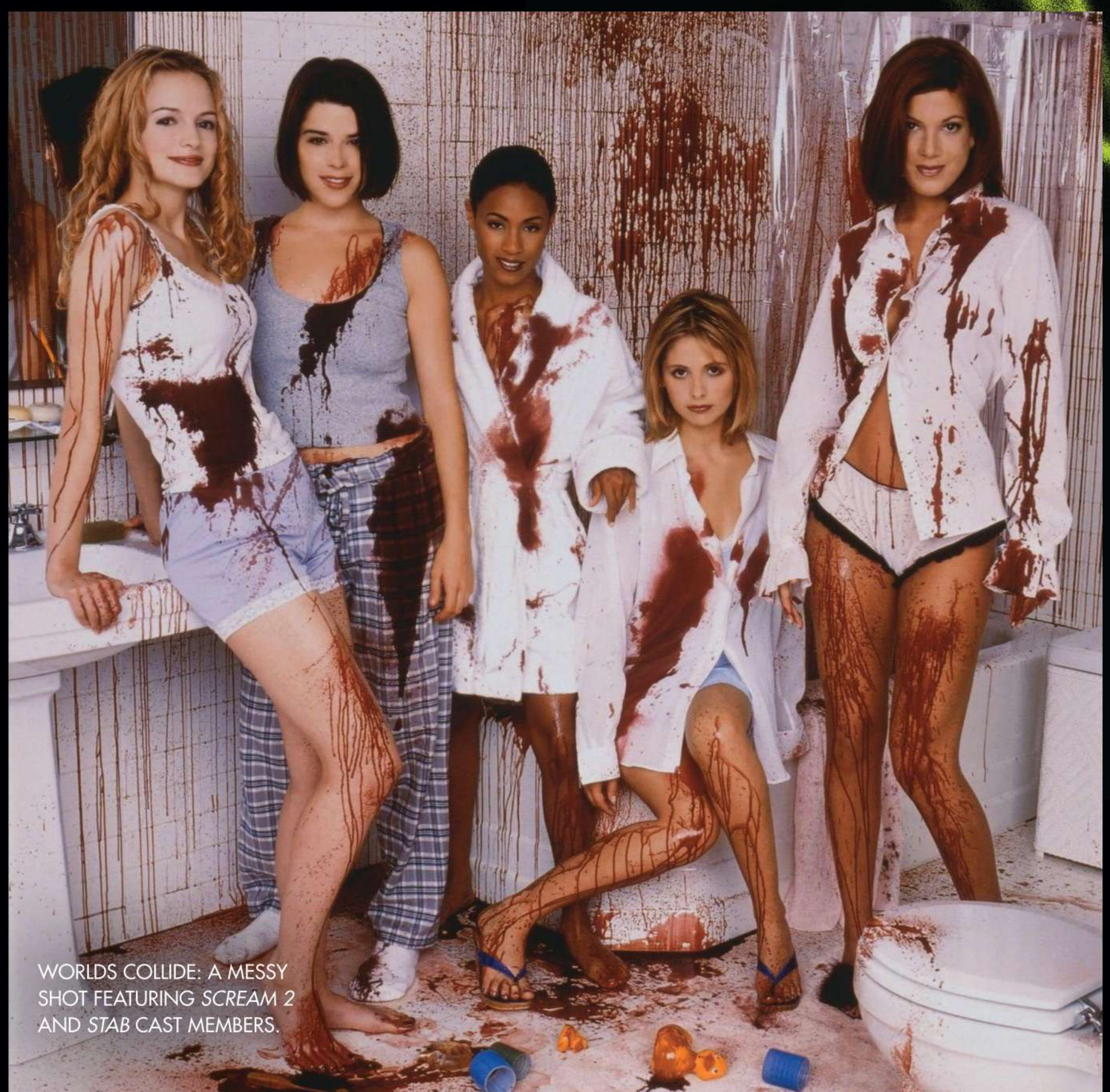
STAB

Inside SCREAM's Movie-Within-A-Movie Franchise

By Mike Scollins

Scream 2 is the best film in the *Scream* series.

The beauty of writing this in print, aside from the gorgeous paper stock, is that no one can click "reply" and tell me I'm wrong. So, for all intents and purposes, I'm just gonna assume it's an unimpeachable fact and you're already on board. 'Cause, it's not what we're talking about anyways. (Why would it be? We've already established it's an unimpeachable fact and you're already on board.*)



WORLDS COLLIDE: A MESSY SHOT FEATURING *SCREAM 2* AND *STAB* CAST MEMBERS.

Nah, this is about the *Stab* series, the massively popular film-within-a-film franchise first introduced in *Scream 2*. Based on the best-selling book, *The Woodsboro Murders* by Gale Weathers, *Stab* is the sensationalized retelling of the events of *Scream* that went on to spawn (at least) six sequels and (at least) a dozen subsequent murders. It also occupies a place in my brain that previously knew long division and family members' birthdays.

We only ever see bits and pieces of *Stab*, but despite this amuse-bouche of a slasher, we know it's prestige horror. I mean, just look at the talent involved. Robert Rodriguez, hot off *From Dusk Till Dawn*. Heather Graham, hot off *Boogie Nights*. Jennifer Jolie, hot off — well, we love her.

Stab got David Schwimmer in 1998! That is "*Friends* Season 4 David Schwimmer"! He probably turned down *Saving Private Ryan* to do this. Right now you're thinking "So if *Friends* exists in the *Scream* universe, who played Monica Gellar?" And to that, I say "Look, nerd. I'm not here to poke holes in *Stab*." One, 'cause I love it, and two, 'cause we'd be here all fucking day.

But, prestige aside, the real-life Sidney Prescott obviously wanted nothing to do with this film. I was curious what movie she would have seen instead and my heart broke. Stab premiered on April 12, 1998. Number one at the box office that weekend? *City of Angels*. *A Meg Ryan film*! If you're a *Scream* fan, you already know why this is so devastating. Sid dreamed of her life being a Meg Ryan film, and instead, her life was being played on screen over by her absolute last choice, Tori Spelling. (So fun in this movie and a great sport.) I'd say this is the ultimate indignity, but the whole "boyfriend killing your mom and friends" stuff is pretty bad, too.

So let's talk about what *Stab* gets right. What it gets *very, very* right. The clip we see of Tori Spelling's Sidney and Luke Wilson's Billy is spot on. *Suspiciously* spot on. It's verbatim, shot for shot, right down to where they hit their marks in the hallway. How is this so accurate?! Gale Weathers' book, as incisive as I'm sure it was, could never have known this interaction took place. And they certainly didn't get the info from Sidney or her deadass boyfriend. But, again, I'm not about poking holes in this series, so I've decided that the screenwriter was just so in the zone that he evolved to another plane of existence allowing him omniscient insight into the events as they actually happened. (As a screenwriter myself, let me just say: must be nice.)

The other thing *Stab* totally nails is its utilization of a state-of-the-art technology called *Stab*-O-Vision. At least I assume they nailed it. I have no fucking idea what it does, and to my knowledge, it's never been used again. (Maybe *Avatar*? IDK.) The screening had ushers rigging life-sized Ghostfaces around the theater so possibly that's related? Then again, that wouldn't explain the "filmed in" part, so I think the swinging Ghostfaces were just one of those in-theater flourishes that have become increasingly rare these days. (Please support indie theaters.) So, for the sake of moving on, I'm just gonna say *Stab*-O-Vision is a fun feature that gives the audience a little papercut every time someone dies.

Now let's talk about what *Stab* gets wrong. Is *Stab* a whodunit like *Scream*? Or are we meant to know up top who the killers are?

If you read *The Woodsboro Murders*, you know it's Billy and Stu. But let's say you're one of those dorks who think reading is lame and writes angry letters to Fango when they review a movie with subtitles — do you know the killers' identities up top?

Like Randy and Dewey in a Baskin Robbins (absurd place to solve a mystery), let's look at the clues. There's a scene in *Scream 2* where a girl runs out of *Stab* because it's too scary. Her friend (using that term loosely 'cause she sucks) calls the girl "chicken shit" because "it's just a movie." Then Girl #1 explains, "No, it's not just a movie. It's a true story. All these kids got killed a couple years ago in California." Her friend had no idea, which leads me to believe the average person is not aware of the film's backstory. Even Maureen and Phil refuse a casual mention of "Wild that this happened to people we're currently enrolled with."

But, if it is a mystery, that makes Tori Spelling's press tour one of the funniest spoilers in film history. Tori opens with, "Well, I play this young girl, Sidney Prescot." (Again, if this were national news, she would not need to explain who Sidney is.) She then goes on to say "*who discovers that her boyfriend is this crazy serial killer who also killed her mother a year before that.*"

If *Stab* is a whodunit (and I think it's clear it is), Tori Spelling has just revealed the entire third act. Imagine Kevin Spacey on Leno going "And then you find out I'm Keyser Söze." (Actually, don't imagine that. 'Cause fuck Kevin Spacey.) Every time I watch this scene, I can only think of Spelling's poor publicist off-camera frantically trying to cut her off.

Luckily, after *Stab 3*, none of this is an issue 'cause we're past the films that bear any resemblance to real life. *Stab 3: Return to Woodsboro* would have been the first entirely fictionalized entry, but after the events of *Scream 3*, that film was shut down and the ill-fated production became the basis for *Stab 3: Hollywood Horror* (based on the final Gale Weathers book of the same name).

If you're interested in the actual trailer for *Stab 2*, please see the *Scream* box set for one of the jankiest DVD extras of all time. It's just scenes from Robert Rodriguez's beautifully shot *Stab* cut with … Dimension interns? High school A/V Club members? I honestly don't know but it's on YouTube and looks like it was shot on a flip phone.

This is also where the *Stab* series goes beautifully off the rails, and it's a shame we've seen so little of it. *Stab 4* is the first to not feature Sidney after she became understandably litigious. Sunrise Studios was left to find new muses after both she and Maureen Prescott were suddenly off-limits. (We'll never forget Jennifer Jolie's incredible delivery of "You're obsessed with her and you're obsessed with *her daughter*!") *Stab 5* has time travel which I assume is Ghostface, T-1000-style, trying to stop Gale from getting those *Scream 3* bangs. *Stabs 6 & 7* demand an FBI corkboard board to even begin to unpack, so, as Dewey would say to Randy in a Baskin Robbins (WHY?! WHY SOLVE A MURDER THERE?!), "let's move on."

I don't know where we are now in the *Stab* universe. Has the franchise been dormant since 2011, like *Scream*? Or is it experiencing a cultural renaissance like the *Fast & the Furious* movies? As we approach Scream '22, I may be more interested in the answer to this question than the "whodunit" one. Which, once press starts, I'm sure Tori Spelling will reveal anyways. 💀

*Okay, fine, if you really wanna have this discussion, you can hit me up on Twitter. I'm @PhilNobileJr.

STAB SUPERFANS PHIL (OMAR EPPS) AND MAUREEN (JADA PINKETT SMITH).

On the Set of SLAPFACE

Social realism and practical FX are used in service of exorcising personal demons in Jeremiah Kipp's new film.

BY MICHAEL GINGOLD

It's a cold, grey, misty November day — perfect for shooting a horror movie — when FANGORIA visits the set of *Slapface*, though the action is taking place indoors, within a small house. Amidst production design that can be best described as "distressed," and featuring a child's map pieced together out of construction paper on one wall, a game is underway. It's being played by a young boy named Lucas (August Maturo from *The Nun*) and a creature known as The Virago Witch (Lukas Hassel), though as rehearsals play out, Hassel is wearing only the Witch's finely detailed head and face prosthetics with his street clothes.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SHUDDER

LUCAS (AUGUST MATURO) AND THE VIRAGO WITCH (LUKAS HASSEL) BOND.

After Hassel gets into full costume and the camera rolls, his scene with Maturo is interrupted by the entrance of another character, who is attacked by the Witch. This poor soul receives what the crew calls "the slap of the century," though the movie's title does not refer to the monster or what she does.

Instead, *Slapface* (set to premiere on Shudder in February following festival play) refers to a mutually abusive ritual between two orphaned brothers: Lucas and the older Tom (Mike Manning, also one of the producers). It ostensibly has to do with discipline, and writer/director Jeremiah Kipp notes, "Tom doesn't see slapping his brother as him being abusive; he regards it as a positive. But it's absolutely sadistic and masochistic, a total failure of the imagination."

Lucas is also bullied by a couple of local girls, and finds solace after he discovers a new "friend" in an abandoned building on the outskirts of his small town. The Virago Witch is a local legend said to have killed numerous children, but she becomes Lucas' confidant, and ultimately his avenger. Kipp sees this supernatural element as a means of creating a film with very real dramatic relevance and resonance. "People who have been abused or bullied deserve to have their stories told with sensitivity and grace," he says. "Telling that kind of story in a genre film allows us to tackle dark subject matter in the spirit of a modern fairy tale. Without the witch and the gingerbread house, *Hansel and Gretel* is about abused and starving children treated horribly by neglectful and cruel parents. *Slapface* has elements of social realism, but once we introduce the monster, we have a device that allows us access into that material."

Slapface is Kipp's sixth feature, but the first based on his original idea. He first wrote it several years ago but was having trouble finding backing, so his cinematographer and frequent collaborator Dominick Sivilli suggested he make a short film as a proof of concept. That version of *Slapface* won strong, positive reactions from its festival play, and the word of mouth reached Manning and fellow producer Joe Benedetto, who optioned the feature and secured the backing.

"Mike was everything you'd want from a creative partner," Kipp says. "He had notes that I had never received from producers before, such as, 'Can you make the resolution even darker? How do you feel about opening the film with the brothers slapping each other with no explanation?' He knew if we began with that chaos, a sense of dread would permeate the rest of the film even before the monster made her appearance."

Manning had another suggestion that changed the nature of the story. The short and initial script involved a boy and his father, and Manning felt the feature should focus on two brothers, with himself playing the older of the two. Kipp agreed, and Manning became both a co-star and a producer on a project that is allowing him to truly connect to his role.

"I've been sleeping in Tom's real bed, which is a hot set," he reveals.

"Slapface is my first time directing something close to my heart, with producers who have fought hard to get this story told." - JEREMIAH KIPP

"It's been an interesting experience, and something I was excited about. I wake up in Tom's bed, and I brush my teeth in Tom's bathroom and go into Tom's kitchen. Sometimes as a producer, it's hard to step out of the business and into the creative, and balance those when you're doing a project, so this has been an opportunity to sort of live Tom's life throughout the filming."

The opportunity to explore a more troubled, problematic character than has been his norm also attracted him to *Slapface*. "August has a Disney background, and I do also," Manning notes. "I was in a show called *Crash & Bernstein* and a movie called *Cloud 9* for them, and that was what I started to become known for. I've done a lot of roles that are sort of 'boy next door' and wholesome, and here, I'm a deadbeat, alcoholic, neglectful older brother who is probably abusing Lucas. It's very different from what I've done before, and Jeremiah has given us the freedom to play and discover these characters for ourselves."

Like everyone else on the *Slapface* set, Manning is full of praise for Maturo, who is not only nailing his complex part but demonstrating a knowledge of the filmmaking process well beyond his 12 years, making suggestions as the scenes are blocked and shot. An actor since age 4 who first won notice on the long-running Disney show *Girl Meets World*, Maturo describes Lucas as "a real daredevil, who doesn't follow the rules at all. So he'll go into a creepy house and not be scared. But then when he meets the monster, he does get frightened!"

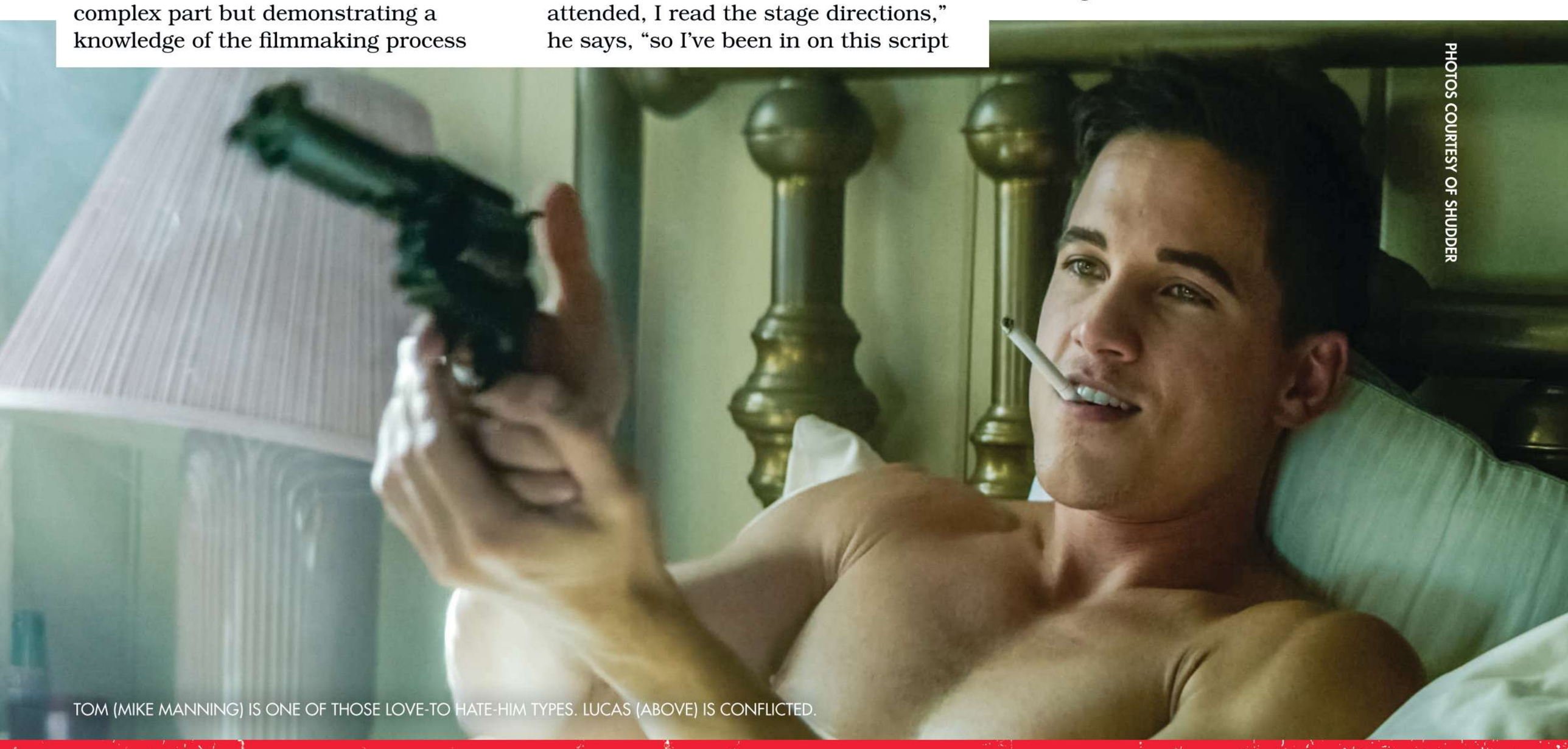
Only on-screen, though, and not behind the scenes. "Whenever I'm making a horror film," he says, "I love watching how they put everything together, and how they do all the makeup and effects. When you see it on the screen, it's the scariest thing ever, but when you're filming it, you're like, 'This isn't scary!' [Laughs] Lukas is really nice, so when I first saw him as the monster, I wasn't scared, because I knew who he was."

The 6-foot-4 Hassel, who sits down for a chat still wearing his prosthetics (applied by Lasander Washington and Tony O'Brien), is making his fourth appearance in a Kipp film and has a long association with *Slapface*. "When Jeremiah first brought the idea of *Slapface* into a writing group we both attended, I read the stage directions," he says, "so I've been in on this script from the very early stages. After a reading one night, I said, 'If and when you ever do this, I would love to take a crack at the monster.' He looked at me like, 'What??' because I'm considered decent-looking when I'm not under all this [*laughs*]. But ultimately he liked that idea."

In a scene lensed in a bedroom, lots of smoke and dim lighting create palpable atmosphere as Maturo enters and takes a gun off a table while Manning feigns sleep on the bed. Yet in both interiors and exteriors, the DP is aiming for a naturalistic feel. "Kat VanCleave's beautiful production design adds to that," Sivilli says. "Her wonderful work helps me imagine what the world is like so that I can create how it should feel. By harmonizing her set design and my lighting, I can create a world that still feels grounded."

That approach extends to his filming of the Witch, whose face is largely kept in the shadows, eschewing hero shots showing off the makeup. "Perhaps the creature is real, or maybe it is a figment of Lucas' imagination; either way, the audience should feel the same thing. If it is in his head, then he is seeing his personal demon, and everyone has those. So the specifics of what this creature actually looks like is left up to the audience's imagination, according to the demons they themselves may already have!"

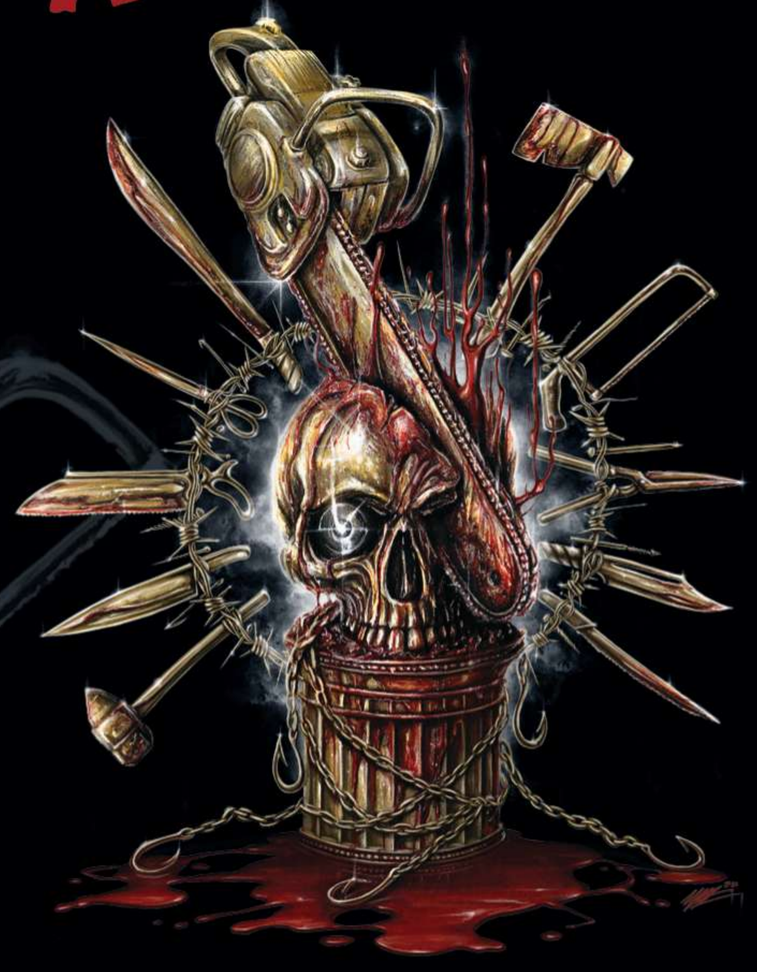
Kipp admits to exorcising a few childhood fears himself via *Slapface*, and notes, "*Slapface* is my first time directing something close to my heart, with producers who have fought hard to get this story told. It's been extremely moving to see this dream realized, and I'm looking forward to the response of audiences and critics. The film belongs to them now." 💀



PHOTOS COURTESY OF SHUDDER

TOM (MIKE MANNING) IS ONE OF THOSE LOVE-TO HATE-HIM TYPES. LUCAS (ABOVE) IS CONFLICTED.

FANGORIA 2022 CHAINSAW AWARDS



As the world tried to return to normal and as several enormous blockbusters served as fiscal canaries in a same-day-streaming coal mine, horror once again proved what Tommy Doyle knew in 1978: you can't kill the Boogeyman!

2021 offered up an embarrassment of riches to our corner of the entertainment sphere, and the titles and creators to the left are a testament to that. Head to bit.ly/Chainsaw2022 to cast your votes; winners will be announced soon!

VOTE

BEST WIDE RELEASE MOVIE
Malignant
Candyman
Last Night in Soho
The Night House
A Quiet Place Part II

BEST LIMITED RELEASE MOVIE
Come True
Hurt
In the Earth
PG: Psycho Goreman
Werewolves Within

BEST FIRST FEATURE
Censor
My Heart Can't Beat Unless You Tell It To
Saint Maud
The Stylist
The Vigil

BEST STREAMING PREMIERE MOVIE
The Boy Behind the Door
Fear Street: 1666
Lucky
The Power
Violation

BEST FOREIGN LANGUAGE MOVIE
Detention
The Feast
Lamb
The Queen of Black Magic
Titane

BEST SERIES
Brand New Cherry Flavor
Chucky
Creepshow
I Know What You Did Last Summer
Midnight Mass

BEST DOCUMENTARY
Woodlands Dark and Days Bewitched
The Found Footage Phenomenon
Mail Order Murder
Dark Shadows and Beyond: The Jonathan Frid Story

BEST LEAD PERFORMANCE
Yahya Abdul-Mateen II, *Candyman*
Niamh Algar, *Censor*
Morfydd Clark, *Saint Maud*
Barbara Crampton, *Jakob's Wife*
Rebecca Hall, *The Night House*
Thomasin McKenzie, *Last Night in Soho*
Agathe Rousselle, *Titane*
Madeleine Sims-Fewer, *Violation*
Julia Sarah Stone, *Come True*
Anya Taylor-Joy, *Last Night in Soho*

BEST SUPPORTING PERFORMANCE
Luke David Blumm, *Son*
Jennifer Ehle, *Saint Maud*
Larry Fessenden, *Jakob's Wife*
Vincent Lindon, *Titane*
Diana Rigg, *Last Night in Soho*
Bill Sage, *Wrong Turn*
Millicent Simmonds, *A Quiet Place Part II*
Jeremy T. Thomas, *Antlers*
Suzanne Voss, *Dementia Part II*

BEST DIRECTOR
Prano Bailey-Bond, *Censor*
David Bruckner, *The Night House*
Anthony Scott Burns, *Come True*
Julia Ducournau, *Titane*
Rose Glass, *Saint Maud*
Edgar Wright, *Last Night in Soho*

BEST SCREENPLAY
Prano Bailey-Bond, *Censor*
John Hsu, Fu Kai-ling, Chien Shih-keng, *Detention*
Ben Collins, Luke Piotrowski, *The Night House*
Rose Glass, *Saint Maud*
Madeleine Sims-Fewer, Dusty Mancinelli, *Violation*

BEST SCORE
John Carpenter, Cody Carpenter, Daniel Davies, *Halloween Kills*
Electric Youth, Pilotpriest, *Come True*
Ben Lovett, *The Night House*
Clint Mansell, *In The Earth*
Tom Schraeder, CJ Johnson, *Hurt*

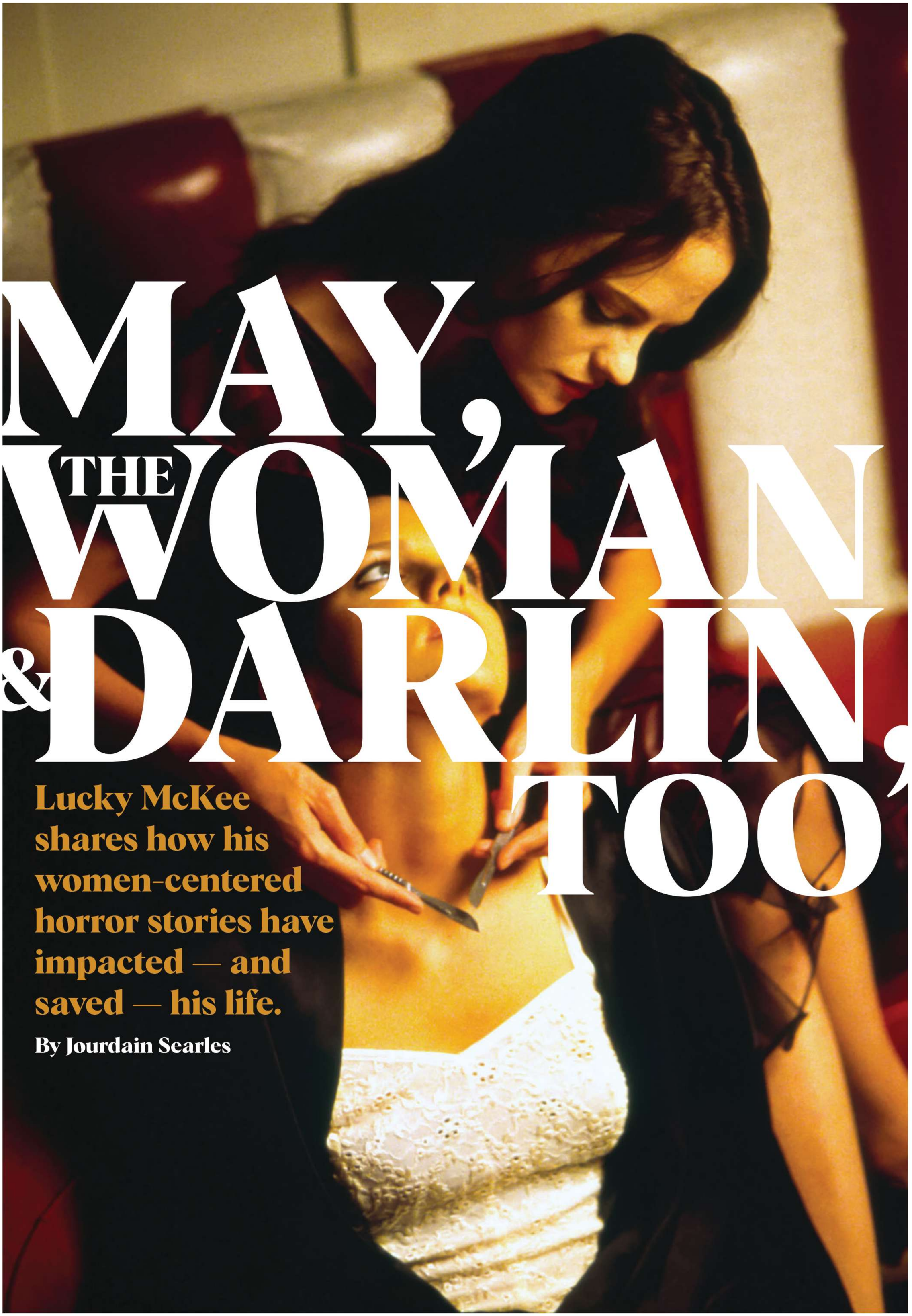
BEST MAKEUP FX
Tara Brawley, *Hurt*
Mark Coulier, *Blood Red Sky*
Christopher Nelson, *Halloween Kills*
Oriane de Neve, CLSFX Atelier 69, *Kandisha*
Francois Dagenais, *Spiral: From the Book of Saw*

BEST CREATURE FX
Barrie Gower, *The Green Knight*
Robert Kurtzman, *Black Friday*
Legacy Effects, Shane Mahan, *Antlers*
Magee FX, Gaslight Studio, *V/H/S/94*
MastersFX, Steven Kostanski, *PG: Psycho Goreman*

BEST COSTUME DESIGN
Lizzie Cook, *Candyman*
Odile Dicks-Mireaux, *Last Night in Soho*
Eulyn Colette Hufkie, *Bingo Hell*
Chieko Matsumoto, *Prisoners of the Ghostland*
Neil McClean, *Slumber Party Massacre*

ACHIEVEMENT IN NON-FICTION
The Last Drive-In with Joe Bob Briggs
Elvira's 40th Anniversary, Very Scary, Very Special, Special
The Boulet Brothers' Dragula

BEST KILL
TELL US!



MAY, THE WOMAN & DARLIN, TOO

Lucky McKee shares how his women-centered horror stories have impacted — and saved — his life.

By Jourdain Searles

There have been many spins on the Frankenstein story, but none as strange, sad and uniquely sexual as *May*, an underrated cult horror film that first premiered at the Sundance Film Festival way back in 2002. It was made by Lucky McKee, then a young horror director with only one indie under his belt, on a modest budget and with a small group of young actors. In the 20 years since its release, it's still difficult to find a film that compares to May's magical mix of humor, gore and existential angst. A marriage between the devastating female alienation of *Carrie* and the playful weirdness of films like *Beetlejuice* and *The Addams Family*, *May* tells a story that is just as funny as it is tragic, with a gothic quirkiness that feels relatable and genuine.

At the center is Angela Bettis as May, a mousy woman whose loneliness and crippling social anxiety stem from her strange childhood. Now in her 20s, she lives an isolated existence working as a vet assistant, making her own clothes and talking to her doll, Suzie, who resides in a glass case in her bedroom. Through flashbacks we learn that May was forced to wear a patch over her lazy eye, leading to traumatic teasing. Unable to make friends, her mother gives her Suzie, instructing May to never remove her from the glass casing. As a result, May longs for touch and connection as an adult, falling for Adam Stubbs (Jeremy Sisto) after seeing his beautiful hands. This infatuation lights a fire inside May, who starts to slowly come out of her shell, even flirting with her ditzy coworker, Polly (Anna Faris). But May's fascination with body parts and surgery puts people off, and the constant rejection chips away at her sanity. Soon, her love of violence and gore begins to consume her and she embarks on a bloody journey to finally "make" a friend.

May plays like a love letter to all the young weirdos who had trouble making friends and took solace in the macabre.

(THIS PAGE AND FACING) MAY (ANGELA BETTIS) IS READY TO PLAY.

Though May could easily be seen as the villain of someone else's story, McKee instead observes her with an empathetic eye, funnelling all his childhood love for horror into his tragic heroine.

"I think a fair amount of the readers of your magazine will identify with feeling like kind of an outsider," McKee says, "especially when you're from a small rural town like I was." Indeed, *May* plays like a love letter to all the young weirdos who had trouble making friends and took solace in the macabre, and McKee counts himself as one of those weirdos. "When I was about eight or nine years old, it was my sister's birthday and we rented a VCR," McKee tells FANGORIA. "My cousin suggested we rent a bunch of horror movies, which we did. We rented *Psycho III*, *Carrie* and *The Hitcher*. And we had a frickin' blast just being scared out of our minds watching those movies." One scene in particular has remained a fixture in his mind: "I just remember that hand coming out of the rocks at the end of *Carrie*, and us just jumping out of our skin. It was such a thrill."

A few years later, at age 11, McKee began making his own DIY films with his friend, inspired by classics like Wes Craven's *A Nightmare on Elm Street*. After high school, he studied film at the University of Southern California, which was where the seeds of *May* were planted. Like many young men, McKee struggled with making friends and talking to girls, issues that were only exacerbated by the intimidating vastness of college.

"All of a sudden, being thrust into one of the biggest film schools in the world, and just being around this wide variety of all kinds of different types of people was really overwhelming, emotionally." McKee channeled that frustration into his script, using the character of May as a stand-in for himself, expressing his anxieties about his niche interests and social awkwardness. "The first incarnation of that story was a short film I made in film school in 1995 called *Fraction* starring John Luckett, who ended up doing all the music and score for *May* and several of my other movies. And then the following year, '96, for my screenwriting class project, I wrote *May*," McKee explains. But despite the immediate emotional importance of the script, after school, McKee put it away and worked on a different project: 2001's *All Cheerleaders Die* (which he'd remake 12 years later). "I co-wrote and co-directed it and just co-edited, co- everything with my buddy Chris Sivertson, and it was kind of our way of learning how to make our first feature together," McKee explains.

But with *May*, McKee went it alone, finding himself in the process.

A year after *All Cheerleaders Die*, one of his friends from school inquired about *May*, and McKee went about revising the script. "I wrote it when I was about 19, 20. And then, obviously, when it got pulled back out of the drawer to make it, I went through a pretty lengthy development process just trying to bring it up to where I was as a filmmaker at that point." It was a labor of love for McKee, who took his already personal script and brought even more heart and depth. The changes he made reflected a recent tragedy: "When we got the chance to develop the movie to actually make all those years later, it hit me at a time that probably saved my life because the first woman I'd ever fallen in love with had just passed away from melanoma."

He then decided to celebrate his lost love and deal with his grief by putting parts of her into the film. McKee pulled influences from "the artists she loved, like John Waterhouse and the Raphaelite painters, and the photos of Julia Margaret Cameron, a photographer from back in the late 1800s," he explains. "And then I realized if I jumbled the letters of May's name around it spelled her name which was Amy, so that was kinda for her."

When it came to casting, Bettis was the obvious choice. Fresh off supporting roles in both *Bless the Child* and Academy-Award winning *Girl, Interrupted*, Bettis was already skilled with dark material. "Angela came in and she had an understanding of the material that nobody else had, an interpretation of it that was just so layered and so detailed... it didn't make any sense to cast anybody else but her," McKee explains, with admiration in his voice. He goes on to reveal that "instead of rehearsing, Angela and I just sat down one-on-one and just kinda went through the script and talked about what was going on underneath it."

This was the beginning of what became a long working relationship between McKee and Bettis, who collaborated again four years later on *Sick Girl*, an hour-long film entry in Showtime's *Masters of Horror* series. The following year they made another feature called *Roman*, a companion piece to *May* about "a lonely man who does something bad and tries to regain his sanity after that." But this time, Bettis was in the director's chair with McKee in the title role. This wouldn't be the last time McKee took a step back, encouraging the star of his film to try their hand at directing.

While *May* is currently celebrating its 20th anniversary, last year was the 10th anniversary of another woman-led horror film that McKee premiered at Sundance: *The Woman*. It's a disturbingly visceral film about the horrors of patriarchy and the struggles women and girls face while trying to maintain their agency within patriarchal systems.

Pollyanna McIntosh plays the role of the nameless feral woman, reprising her character from Andrew van den Houten's 2009 horror film, *Offspring*. *The Woman* takes its title character out of the harsh wilderness and introduces them to deceptive,

Throughout his career, McKee has used his films to tell unique, emotional stories about women and girls, approaching the relationship between director and actress as a collaborative one.

PHOTO BY CHELSEA BOOTHE

TOP: POLLYANNA MCINTOSH AS *THE WOMAN*; BOTTOM: LUCKY MCKEE SUPERVISING SOME SAVAGERY.

suburban brutality where clean-cut men and boys abuse women with a smile on their faces. McIntosh's character is captured by Chris Cleek, a white family man (Sean Bridgers) who looks like he jumped out of a '50s sitcom, aided by his sadistic son, Brian (Zach Rand). Meanwhile, his wife, Belle (Bettis), and oldest daughter Peggy (Lauren Ashley Carter) stand by helplessly, both wounded souls under the thumb of their patriarch. Among all the chaos is the youngest daughter, Darlin' (Shyla Molhusen), who quickly takes to the mysterious woman, unafraid of her violent tendencies.

Throughout his career, McKee has used his films to tell unique, emotional stories about women and girls, approaching the relationship between director and actress as a collaborative one. He credits being "raised by strong women" with fostering his respect and admiration for actresses and women-led stories. While making *The Woman*, McKee worked with star McIntosh to refine the script. According to McIntosh, McKee asked her for "notes on everything" including the way all the characters are written and how the story played out. That validation helped McIntosh be comfortable while filming some of the more horrifying scenes, prioritizing her comfort and welcoming her input. "Lucky kind of ruined me for everyone else because now I have all sorts of ideas," McIntosh says with a laugh.

When it came time for a sequel, McKee insisted that McIntosh take the reins. The trilogy was completed with *Darlin'*, which was written and directed by McIntosh (who also co-starred) and premiered at the South by Southwest Film Festival in 2019. The film follows Darlin' (now played by Lauryn Canny) as an adolescent, trying to find her way in the world after growing up feral in the woods following the events of *The Woman*.

Making the trilogy was an empowering experience for McIntosh. "I think any woman who's lived in this land of ours understands what *The Woman* is about, what the joy and the strength is in playing a character like that, that hasn't been feminized," McIntosh explains excitedly. "Shedding all the expectations of society and getting under her skin has always been really fun to do. And she gets more and more bow-legged as the series goes on. By the time she's in *Darlin'* she's like a gunslinger."

When asked about the film, McKee can't stop praising McIntosh for her storytelling and craft. "It just made so much sense because nobody understands the character better than her. And then she wrote this very personal script and did a hell of a job directing and brought in a great cast," he muses. "Polly took it by the horns. I think it's the most disturbing of the three films, too, in a lot of ways. Really potent. She's a hell of a director."

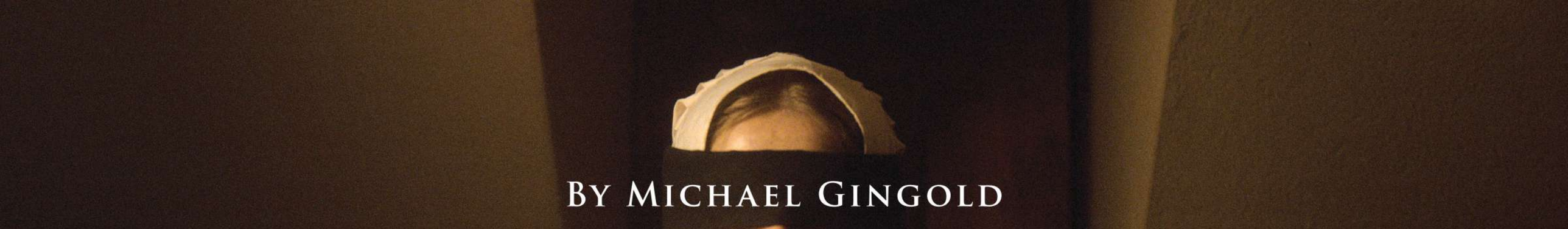
With that chapter in his career officially over, McKee has a new film just on the horizon, his first centering solely on men. The aptly titled *Old Man* stars veteran actor Stephen Lang and indie horror staple Marc Senter. "It's based on a play so it's pretty much a chamber piece," he tells me. "Two guys in a cabin in the Smoky Mountains in the middle of nowhere, trying to figure out who each other are," he explains. After 20 years of making films, McKee is finally ready to explore masculinity and fatherhood in his work.

Returning to *May*, McKee gets wistful. "So many great things sprouted from making that film. For one, I feel like it corrected some of my social awkwardness in a positive way. There's a newfound confidence and comfort in your own skin once you get one out of the way," McKee explains.

"On a personal level, when I showed *May* at the Sitges Film Festival in Spain, I met this young woman who was about 20 years old who was a fantastic illustrator. We became friends, and she started illustrating for me. She illustrated for me for about eight or nine years, and about eight or nine years into being friends with each other we became a couple. And a few years after that we got married." The illustrator is Vanessa McKee, who continues to create outstanding portraits (see page 58).

"So many of these great things came from that movie," he continues, "and now we have a son together and we still work together, but it's for life at this point. It's just beautiful that this movie I made about how hard it is to connect with a person in your love life or just in life in general, making a movie about that led me to the person I would spend the rest of my life with. You kinda can't ask for better than that. None of the happiness in my life would have happened if I hadn't made *May*." 💀

LAURYN CANNY AND POLLYANNA MCINTOSH IN *DARLIN'*.



By Michael Gingold

House of Secrets

FANGO VISITS THE SET OF

The Last Thing Mary Saw

The old farmhouse serving as the key shooting site of *The Last Thing Mary Saw* is located on picturesque turf near Stony Brook, New York, alongside Long Island Sound, and the dining room where the crew is set up on the day FANGORIA visits is redolent with mid-1800s atmosphere. With the windows covered to keep the sun out, the space is lit by real and simulated fire- and candlelight, with a fog machine providing atmosphere smoke. The actors are all done up in proper period garb, though in between takes, a couple of them break the illusion by checking their cell phones. You get a sense right away of the mood writer/director Edoardo Vitaletti is going for — and that he's very much achieving it.

Set in 1843, *The Last Thing Mary Saw* (which played festivals in 2021 and is scheduled for a January Shudder premiere) stars Stefanie Scott (*Insidious: Chapter 3*) in the title role of the youngest daughter in a repressive religious family. After the death of her grandmother Constance (Judith Roberts), she is interrogated by the local authorities, who believe Mary to be responsible. The movie then takes us back in time to reveal what led Mary to this point, adopting what Vitaletti calls "a particular, nonlinear structure. I wanted to see if I could tell a story by peeling off the innermost layers, as opposed to the outermost ones, and see how that unfolds."

Vitaletti, who's making his feature debut with *The Last Thing Mary Saw* at the age of just 23, took influences from his own life: "I was born and raised in Italy, in a very Catholic community — not so much my family, but in general it was very restrictive, at times obsessively so. The story of the two main characters, Mary and Eleanor, who are trying to find happiness within a culture that does not approve of it, spoke a lot to personal experiences. Plus, I have a fascination with the time period and this general area of the country, which has a rich history starting with the Puritans and continuing through the Protestant awakenings and so forth. That all blended together into the telling of this story."

The drama and terror hinge on the forbidden relationship between Mary and Eleanor, her family's maid, played by Isabelle Fuhrman from *Orphan*, *The Hunger Games* and *Cell*. The actress finds that the farmhouse, with its small rooms and narrow halls and stairwells, is a perfect location for this story. "It's about the two of them finding happiness with each other in this confined, claustrophobic household, where you constantly feel like you're being watched," Fuhrman says. "This house has really become a character in the story, because when we first showed up, you realized that every step you take, you can hear throughout the whole house, and that's because it was built at the time this story takes place. So it puts a lot into your head about what it must have been like at that time: trying to sneak around and have a friendship, to have somebody you can confide in in a place where you can't really say what's on your mind, and you can't speak loud enough that someone might hear."

For Scott, who previously co-starred with Fuhrman in the 2018 comedy *Good Girls Get High*, that sense of confinement intensifies the religious repression at the heart of the movie's horrors. "Mary has grown up entirely in the farmhouse," the actress notes. "She has never been outside it before, so she's kind of trapped in this world, and doesn't know any others. All she really does is study Bible verses every day, and her duty is to fear God. It's a very fear-based family; there doesn't seem to be much love or joy, and Mary finds that in Eleanor, and that's why she can't keep away from her. She's always sneaking off to try to find Eleanor, because with her Mary has found this new sense of a different world, or a different way to live. That contributes to her questioning the way she's being treated by her family, based on beliefs that she maybe doesn't believe in."

"Though they come from different backgrounds," Vitaletti adds, "the one thing the girls share is, they both want to get out of this house. One of them was born into it, the other has found herself trapped in it, and their common desire is to be together elsewhere. However, something I've talked about with them is, they are trying to break free from this reality, but what happens when they succeed and have to go out into the world? It may be a shortsighted dream, but it's

motivated by the need for love and feeling something so overwhelmingly positive for the first time."

As if this intrigue isn't enough, more is added by the arrival of Rupert (*Lords of Chaos*' Rory Culkin), a drifter who happens upon the family and attempts to take advantage of them. "He's sort of a home invader," says Culkin. "He's from the outskirts; he's very much an outsider. He's such a strange character." In fact, Culkin found *The Last Thing Mary Saw* to be very odd in general when it was first presented to him — which was part of what inspired him to join in. "After I read the script, I wanted to meet Edoardo and ask him, 'What the fuck did I just read?' That was the first thing I said when we sat down: 'Can you explain this to me?' I really enjoyed our conversation; we seemed to agree on a lot of things, and this was something I definitely wanted to be a part of, and a character I wanted to help develop."

Lording over the brood is Constance, who may be deceased as the movie opens but is a powerful presence as it flashes back to prior events. "She is the matriarch," says Roberts, whose long career has encompassed David Lynch's *Eraserhead* and James Wan's *Dead Silence* (in which, coincidentally, she played Mary Shaw). "All of the people in this family turn to her, and have a great deal of fear of her. It's as if she has something on them, and her belief system is so strong that it has made her willing to punish people who do not follow it. She's a strong force, and tries to keep all of her family in line with what she thinks—and they do, out of fear of punishment and reprimands."

Not all of the violence in *The Last Thing Mary Saw* is psychological, as signaled midway through the shoot day when the crew starts draping the walls and equipment with plastic sheets to protect them from spurting blood. Even Fuhrman wraps a plastic poncho over her period garb so she can stand by a monitor and watch the scene play out. It's a small but shocking burst of violence, and the victim and the person responsible won't be revealed here.

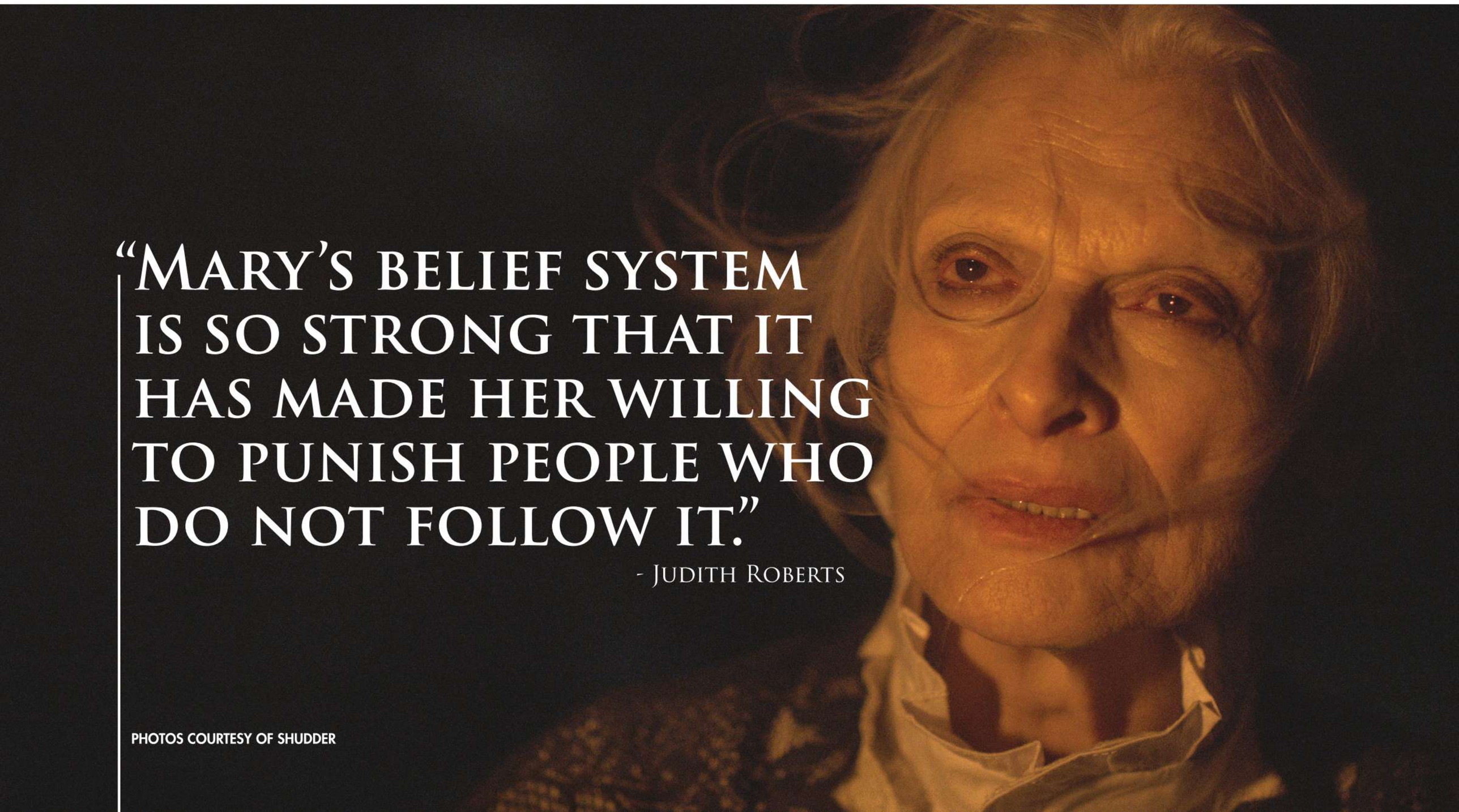
Heading for another, blood-free part of the house, Fango catches up with Harrison Allen and Madeleine Schumacher, two of *The Last Thing Mary Saw*'s producers who first met Vitaletti at New York University's film school. Vitaletti first wrote a shorter version of *Last Thing* as his thesis film before he was convinced to expand it, and the trio began work on the feature while still students (Allen has just graduated and Schumacher has one semester at the time of this set visit).

"It's a really smart horror film that earns its scares," Allen says. "It doesn't rely on jump scares or a lot of gore; it's just a lot of things that Edoardo knows make people feel uncomfortable or creeped out." Adds Schumacher, "I find the things that are most frightening are when you're waiting for something to happen and it hasn't happened yet, vs. someone jumping out of a closet. This feels very intelligent, and it's rooted in so much research. Edoardo was very interested in the history behind this, and making sure his story fit within its time period, because it is so specific. There's a lot of detail to it."

Allen brought the project to producers Aimee Schoof and Isen Robbins, whose credits include Jeff Lieberman's *Satan's Little Helper* and Rob Schmidt's *The Alphabet Killer*. After taking it on, they found one of the challenges to be finding the right location within an easily accessible distance. "Every place we went to fell apart; it became too expensive, it wasn't working out," Robbins recalls. "Obviously, during production you'd like to be in a place where you can drive home after work and go to sleep, and we weren't finding anything. We began to find pieces — like, we could shoot all the living-room stuff on one end of Staten Island, other scenes on the other end of Staten Island, and then other stuff in Queens, and it was terrifying. And out of the blue, Rose Kelso, Edoardo's girlfriend…"

"Who's from Stony Brook," Schoof picks up the story, "was like, 'Let's go scout my hometown! I know it's not in the zone, but I know a lot of people out there, so let's check it out.' This house showed up in one of the location files, and Rose came out here, and when the door opened, it was her childhood kindergarten teacher! So of course, that worked out, and Rose immediately became location manager and took on a huge role on the movie."

The movie gods smiled on *The Last Thing Mary Saw* at that moment — appropriate for a movie that, Fuhrman says, is particularly concerned with faith. "This movie, in many ways, is about how you define what you believe in. This family is put in a position where they have to question it because of the way their daughter is acting, with somebody who is in a completely different social class from them. And also, how do you define acts of God? Are they the bad things that happen to you, or the good things? Or are they both?" 💀



PHOTOS COURTESY OF SHUDDER

That Time They Made A Kids' Novel Out Of

ALIEN

By Michael Gingold

"Kane screamed as a spurt of blood shot out of his chest. His body twisted from side to side. A ripping noise tore through the dining room. With a squeal, a small yellow creature burst from Kane's chest. Rows of sharp teeth gleamed in the light. It looked like a snake with a round head."

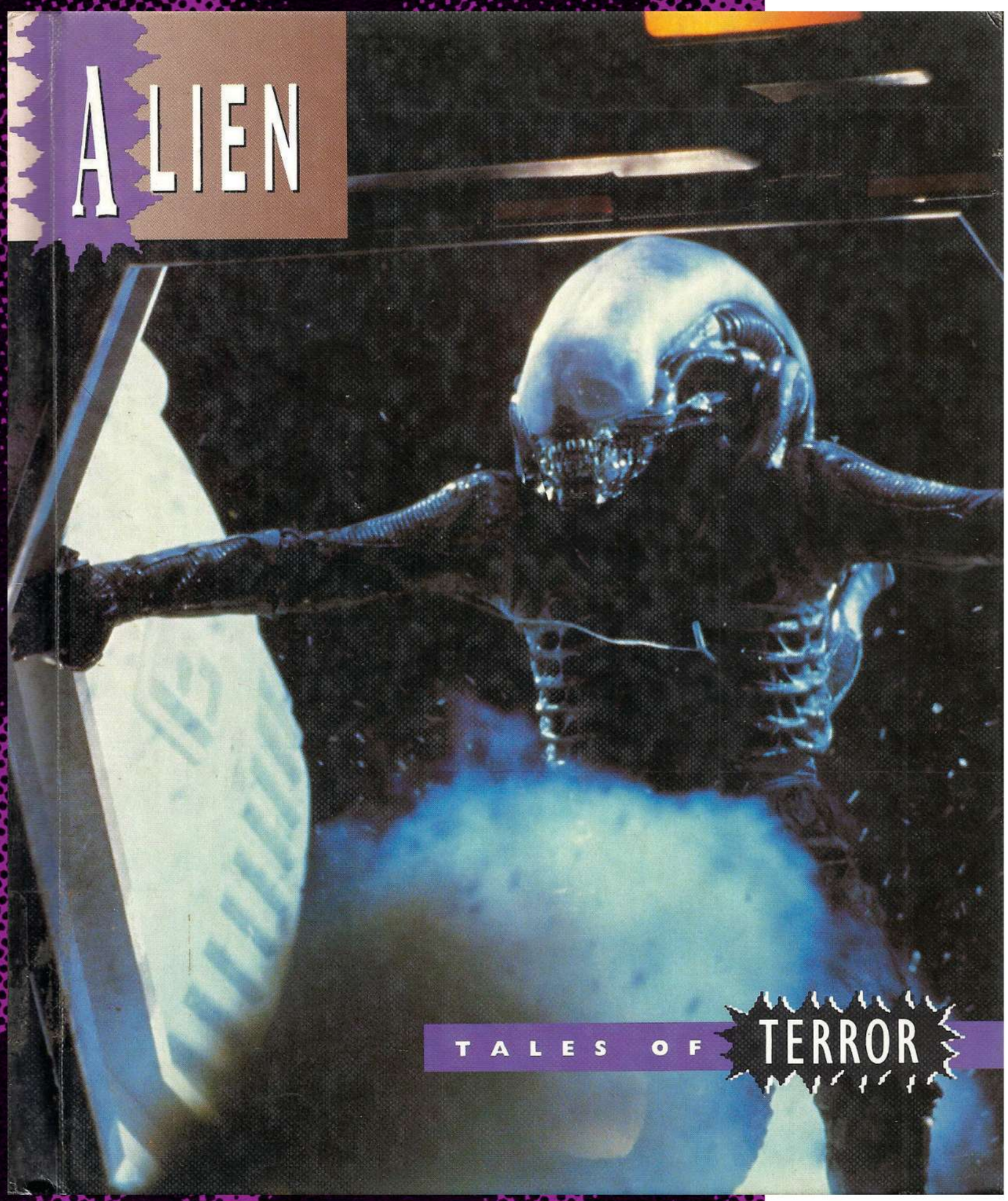
—*Alien*, by Jane O'Brien

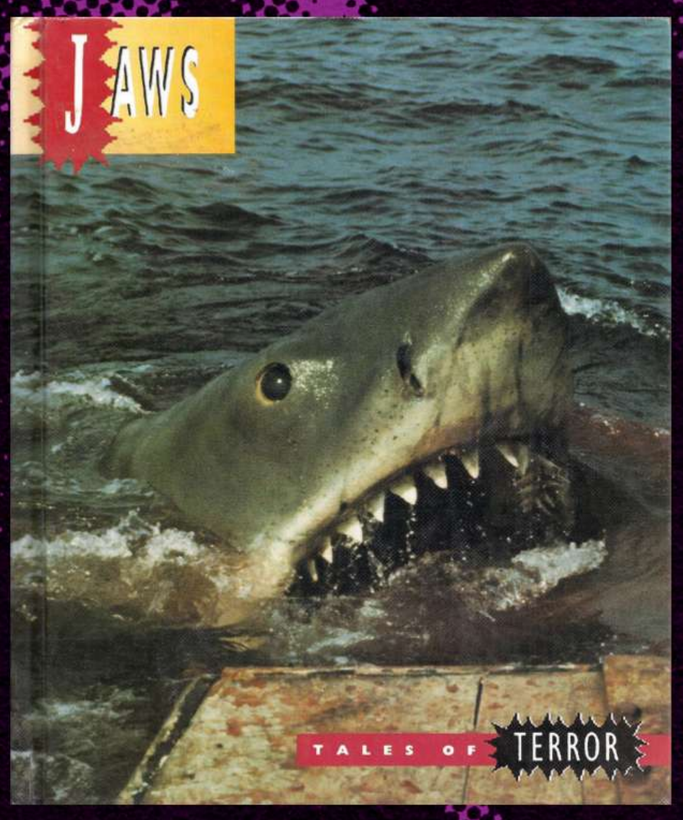
If you're a monster kid who grew up in the late '70s or beyond, you likely remember the *Monsters Series* books published by Crestwood House between 1977 and 1982. Beginning with stalwarts such as *Dracula*, *Frankenstein* and *Godzilla* and subsequently digging deeper into the '50s for the likes of *The Blob* and *The Deadly Mantis*, these tomes, published in both hardcover and paperback, were catnip — and an education — for budding horror fans. Back in the days before cable movie channels and VHS, they were a way for preteens to experience the excitement and thrills of classic fright favorites and became a staple on elementary-school library shelves. Today, they are fondly remembered by many fans, and their popularity endures; a classic-horror podcast (albeit not specifically devoted to the books) called Crestwood House launched earlier this year.

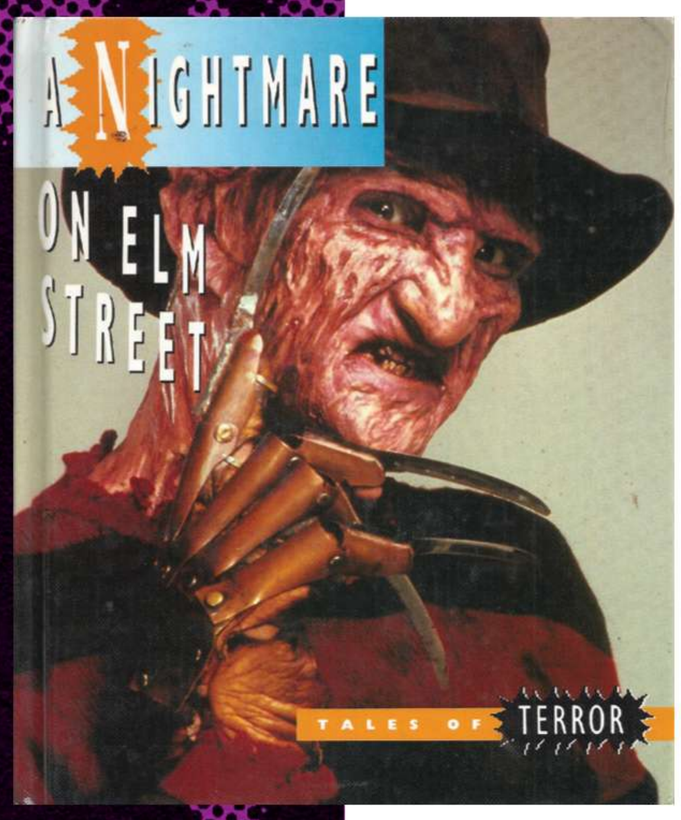
A decade later, the publisher issued another, more unlikely series of child-oriented fear-film adaptations that aren't nearly as well-known and weren't nearly as widespread. Which is somewhat understandable; if you were a grade-school librarian, would you put titles like *The Fly* or *A Nightmare on Elm Street* out for the little ones' perusal? Nonetheless, those two books, both written by E.L. Eloise Flood, were among the octet of hardcover *Tales of Terror* tomes released by Crestwood House in 1991. Among them were also Jane O'Brien's *Alien*, Deborah Crisfield's *The Amityville Horror* and *Jaws*, R.A. Noonan's *Critters*, and Mark Crose's *Halloween* and *The Terminator*.

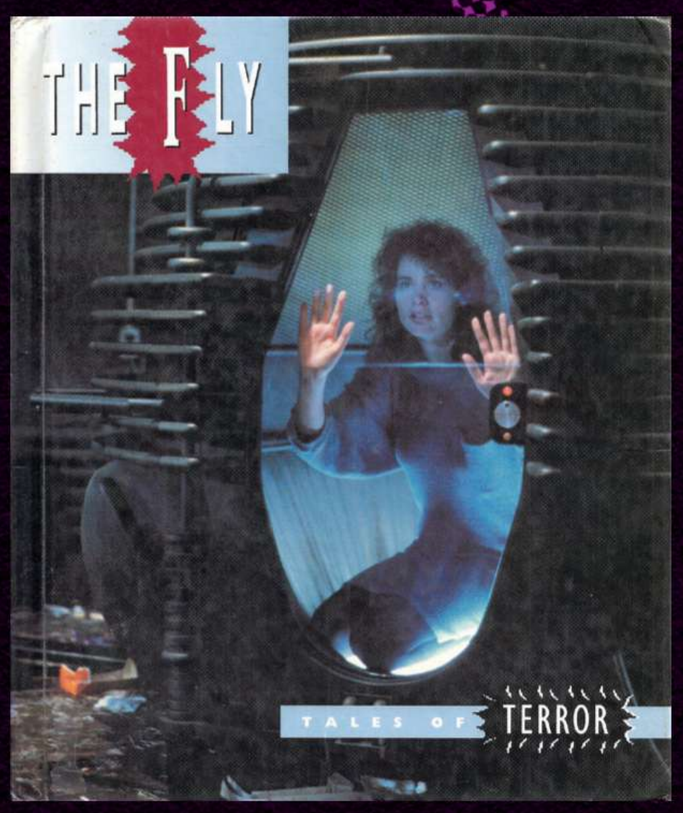
Unlike the Monsters Series with their distinctive, Halloween-evoking black, white and orange covers and spines (though later editions were published in purple), the *Tales of Terror* each had a different back cover and spine color. Like their predecessors, they were all fronted with full-cover photos from the films in question. In these cases, of course, the pics were full-color, as were the profusion of stills that illustrated the 48 pages inside. Some of these were pretty rare — stuff that even FANGORIA never got — from the shark shot fronting *Jaws* to a behind-the-scenes *Nightmare* pic of the cast cuddling up to Freddy. The exception was *Halloween*, which was stocked with muddy screen shots from a low-grade video version, and sported a still from *Halloween 4* on the cover.

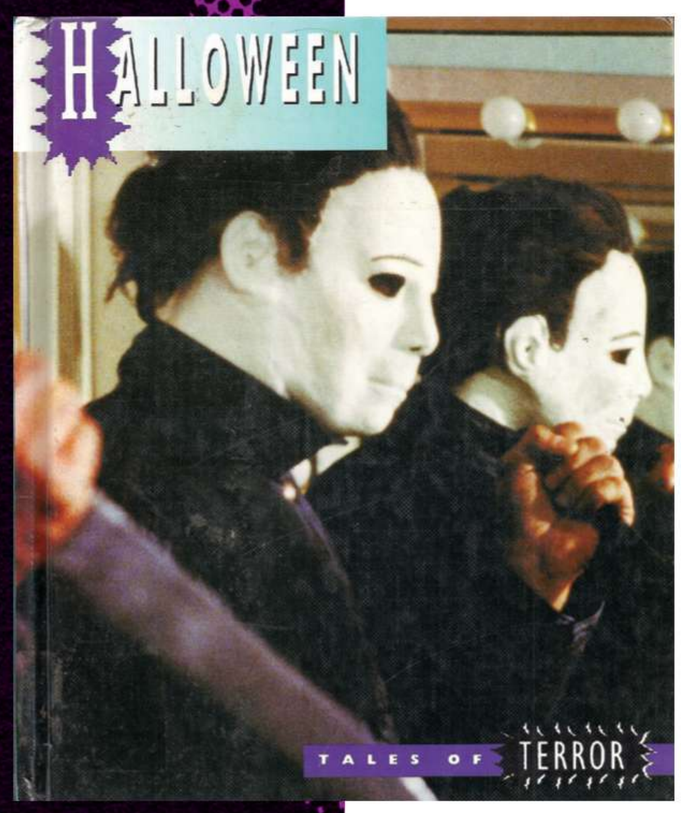
The most gruesome imagery from the films wasn't represented, naturally. But how do you tackle prose adaptations of movies like these for readers way too young to see the movies themselves? Without an overabundance of delicacy, it turns out. The horrific highlights weren't described in their complete gory glory, but neither did the











authors turn away from the gruesome details. Here's Flood's description of one of the nastiest moments in *The Fly*: "The acid vomit seared into Stathis's skin. He shrieked. The pain was like nothing he had ever felt. He stared at his hand, appalled. It was melting! His fingers were dissolving. Blood and steam frothed around the stumps. In a moment the acid had eaten clear through to the bone. Stathis couldn't bear it anymore. Groaning, he fell to the ground."

And here's the less grisly but certainly shocking opening murder from Crose's *Halloween*, with a bit of psychological motivation added:

"Her cries enraged him. Had she forgotten all the times she had laughed at him? The times she had ignored him? Michael plunged the knife into his sister over and over again. Her hands fought desperately to block the slashing blows. Then, slowly, painfully, her screams faded."

Pretty heavy stuff for the intended audience. On the other hand, needless to say, any hint of the sex between Michael's sister and her boyfriend was omitted, as was the boinking between Linda (sic) and Bob later on. (That's not the only way their scene was sanitized; Linda's insistence that Bob get her a beer was changed to a request for a soda!) In *The Fly*, Seth bringing Tawny back to his place for a carnal encounter was completely gone, and thus so was Veronica's classic line, "Be afraid... be very afraid." Indeed, throughout these books, not only was the writing in general aimed at early readers but the dialogue was often simplified or altered. The most notable example was *Jaws*, in which many of the classic lines were gone or rewritten, and Quint's *Indianapolis* speech was not even hinted at.

All the Tales of Terror featured behind-the-scenes sections at the end, with an emphasis on how the special effects were achieved — no doubt to help reassure impressionable readers that it was all make-believe. *Amityville Horror* also had info about the true story, including the DeFeo family murders, and noted changes and additions in the film: "For instance, there was never a baby-sitter who was locked in a closet. The movie people made up that scene to make the film scarier. In a horror film it's always good to have people screaming and crying."

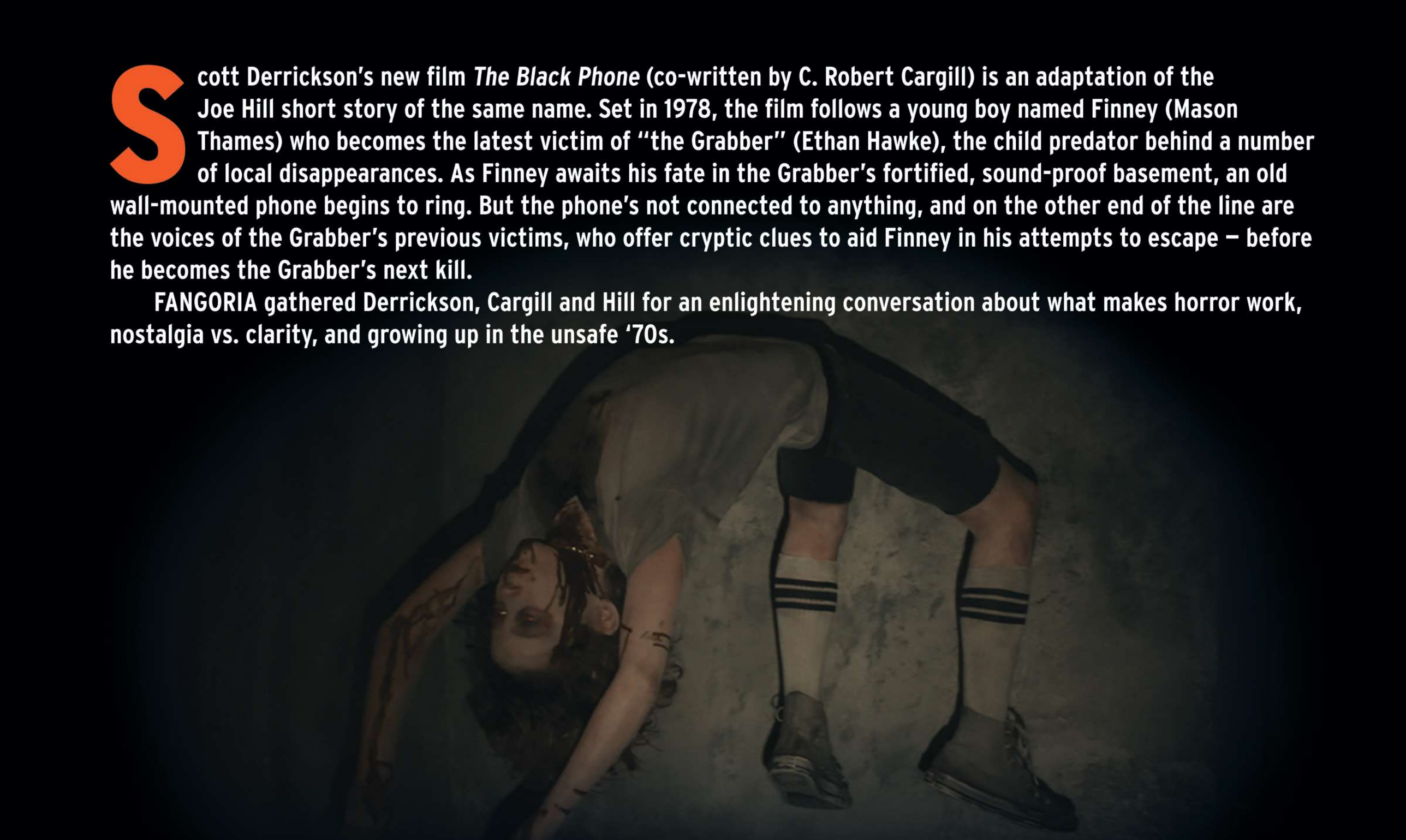
Perhaps there was concern that that would be the effect these books would have on the little ones, resulting in the *Tales of Terror* being far more obscure than their predecessors. You could see them as being just slightly ahead of their time, as R.L. Stine's *Goosebumps* series launched just a year later. In any case, these eight slender tomes are now coveted collectibles, likely more sought after by adults today than by kids back when they were first published. 💀

A CONVERSATION ON THE BLACK PHONE

WITH JOE HILL, C. ROBERT CARGILL, AND SCOTT DERRICKSON

Scott Derrickson's new film *The Black Phone* (co-written by C. Robert Cargill) is an adaptation of the Joe Hill short story of the same name. Set in 1978, the film follows a young boy named Finney (Mason Thames) who becomes the latest victim of "the Grabber" (Ethan Hawke), the child predator behind a number of local disappearances. As Finney awaits his fate in the Grabber's fortified, sound-proof basement, an old wall-mounted phone begins to ring. But the phone's not connected to anything, and on the other end of the line are the voices of the Grabber's previous victims, who offer cryptic clues to aid Finney in his attempts to escape — before he becomes the Grabber's next kill.

FANGORIA gathered Derrickson, Cargill and Hill for an enlightening conversation about what makes horror work, nostalgia vs. clarity, and growing up in the unsafe '70s.



SCOTT DERRICKSON: Joe, have we ever told you why we decided to write *The Black Phone* script on spec?

JOE HILL: I don't think so.

SD: Well, I had gone through a very rough period of my life. I'd been in therapy for almost three years — mostly dealing with my early childhood growing up in North Denver in a violent household — and having gone through so much and having reckoned with so much of my own past, I was very interested in trying to make a kind of American *The 400 Blows*. I really love that one. In fact, I still think that movie contains what is probably the best child performance I've ever seen on film. It showed the traumas of childhood, but also the resilience of children.

So, I started with that, but I couldn't find a story that felt like it would capture that feeling until I read "The Black Phone." That's when Cargill and I started to talk about taking that concept and combining it with your short story. And that's essentially what the movie is.

JH: One of the things I love about *The Black Phone* is the way it takes us into a past that I remember. I remember 1978 looking like that and kids behaving like that and parents being that way. I don't think that that's actually something that has been represented very often. Even though we are in a time period obsessed with nostalgia. We're drenched in it! But the

PHOTOS COURTESY UNIVERSAL PICTURES

GRIFFIN (MICHAEL BANKS REPETA) HANGS AROUND THE BASEMENT (ABOVE); SCOTT DERRICKSON AND MASON THAMES WATCH *THE TINGLER*.

weird thing about nostalgia is, that it isn't true. Nostalgia is a memory of the past that tends to be cast in a rich, golden light that makes everything look a lot better than it really was. Nostalgia sands off all the rough edges, all the ugliness, all the regret, all the sadness.

C. ROBERT CARGILL: I love *Stranger Things*, but there's this thing in season two, where all four of the friends show up in Ghostbuster costumes. And I was like, "None of us had the money to get real Ghostbuster costumes." Kids in the '80s didn't have matching costumes like that. You made a DIY thing yourself, and it did not look like a stage-made thing. I love that element, and I love those scenes, but it's one of those things where you say, "That's not really what it was like."

Nostalgia is a memory of the past that has been sort of cast in a rich golden light that makes everything look a lot better than it really was. Nostalgia sands off all the rough edges, all the ugliness, all the regret, all the sadness.

JH: I think *Stranger Things* is such a great fucking show, but the Spielberg films of the 1980s — that wasn't actually what the '80s were like, either. And in *Stranger Things*, you're seeing the 1980s that existed in Spielberg films like *E.T.* and *Poltergeist*.

SD: I think that the distinction between nostalgia and the dreaming naturalism of, say, *The 400 Blows*, is a fixation upon the idiosyncratic details of the era, which is what filmmakers often do. In reaching back, as you said — and this was the case with *Stranger Things*, which I also absolutely love — there is oftentimes a fetishization of the way things looked and a romantic longing for certain aspects of the past.

The trick — and this is why all the therapy is beneficial, by the way — is to try to capture not what that era looked or sounded like, not what the films of that era represented, but what did it *feel* like? So, what I was trying very hard to do with *The Black Phone* was to make a movie that felt like the late '70s felt to me when I was 12.

JH: I don't wanna give anyone reading this article a false impression of the movie, because it's scary as fuck and moves really fast. It's an absolute bullet. But at the same time, one of the things I do love about *The Black Phone* is that it has the patience to just sit with the kids and see the reality of their own lives washing over them. There's a moment when Finney is up late. His father [played by Jeremy Davies] has passed out, as he usually does, in his easy chair from drinking. And Finney is watching this late-night, black-and-white horror picture, *The Tingler*. There's a bathtub filled with blood and the blood is in vivid Technicolor. And then this hand comes out of the bathtub, and we get Finney's face in the glow of the TV, and he's transfixed. He's absolutely pinned in place with this mix of wonder and horror. That boomeranged me right back to watching late-night horror films at the cusp of 1980 or so, right as the '70s tipped into the '80s, and what it felt to be that kid. That was powerful, and I also thought it was brave, because so many films are afraid to take a moment and let the characters be still on the screen.

CRC: Where the hell did the original short story come from, Joe? What was the trigger for that?

JH: At the time I wrote the story, I was a failed novelist. I had four novels in the closet that I'd been unable to sell to anyone, but I had started to write successful short stories. Around late 2003, early 2004, I got on a little bit of a roll, and I wrote a bunch of pretty good short stories back to back-to-back. "You Will Hear the Locust Sing," "Abraham's Boys," "In the Rundown," and "The Black Phone." I don't remember what inspired the story. There was no real click where I thought, "Oh, *that's* what I should do next."

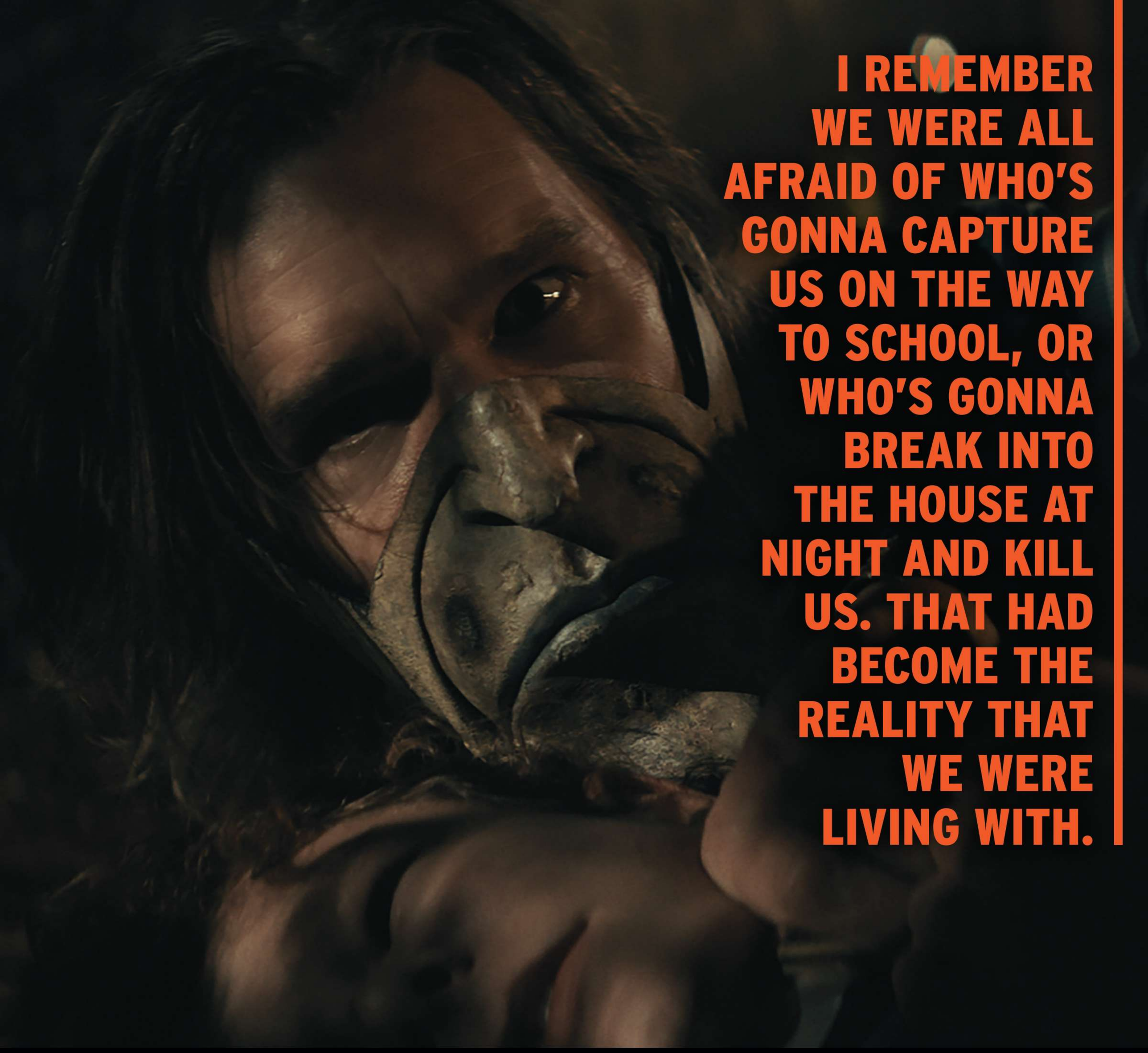
I grew up in Bangor, Maine, in a very old house. There was a phone in the basement that wasn't connected to anything. I found that phone creepy. Unsettling. I think mostly because it wasn't connected to anything, but it was also in the wrong place. It didn't make sense for a phone to be in the basement, this room with a dirt floor and crumbling concrete walls. I must've thought a 1,000 times: "If that phone ever rings, I'm gonna scream." [*laughs*] When you're a little kid, you're scared to go into the basement. You're scared of the basement smell, the basement dark, and walking into a cobweb and getting it all over your face. At the time, I think the worst thing I could imagine was that phone ringing. I guess that's the genesis of the story, but God knows if I was thinking about that phone when I wrote it.

CRC: I know you talked to me about thinking of ['70s serial killer] John Wayne Gacy.

JH: Certainly when I was thinking about that kind of child killer, that

PHOTOS COURTESY UNIVERSAL PICTURES

SUCKING (WIND) IN THE '70S: GWEN SHAW (MADELEINE MCGRAW) AND MATTY (JORDAN ISAIAH WHITE) AFTER A PARTICULARLY BRUTAL AFTERSCHOOL SCRAP. THINGS WERE DIFFERENT THEN.


I REMEMBER WE WERE ALL AFRAID OF WHO'S GONNA CAPTURE US ON THE WAY TO SCHOOL, OR WHO'S GONNA BREAK INTO THE HOUSE AT NIGHT AND KILL US. THAT HAD BECOME THE REALITY THAT WE WERE LIVING WITH.

kind of predator, I was envisioning someone with echoes of Gacy. There was another child killer in the late '90s who I was aware of, an absolutely sickening, heartbreaking killing outside of Boston. And that's haunted me my whole life, thinking about it. I think one of the things that we turn to fiction for is the justice we don't really get to experience in real life, the kind that makes the scales balance. In real life, awful things happen and there's no way to fix them, but sometimes we can fix it in stories. And I do think that counts for something.

SD: It does, and your story about writing "The Black Phone" has a parallel to this subject for me. The primary feeling I remember having as a child was fear. My earliest memory up until high school was the violence of the neighborhood. I was the youngest kid on a street full of bullies. It was just a violent part of town; people were fighting all the time, bleeding all the time. It was just how it was, and everybody's dad … well, everybody got whipped with belts really hard, and *that* was just how it was. But I also remember filtering into my elementary and middle school life — and particularly in elementary school — the new presence of serial killers.

So, it was the mid-'70s. I'm in elementary school, and everybody was telling urban legends about the worst kind of serial killers. I think Ted Bundy had just come through Colorado and killed a bunch of people. And, of course, the Manson murders had all just occurred. In my own experience, I was eight years old when I got a knock on my door and it was a friend who lived next door, who was three years older than me. I opened the door and he was crying, and he just said, "Somebody killed my mom."

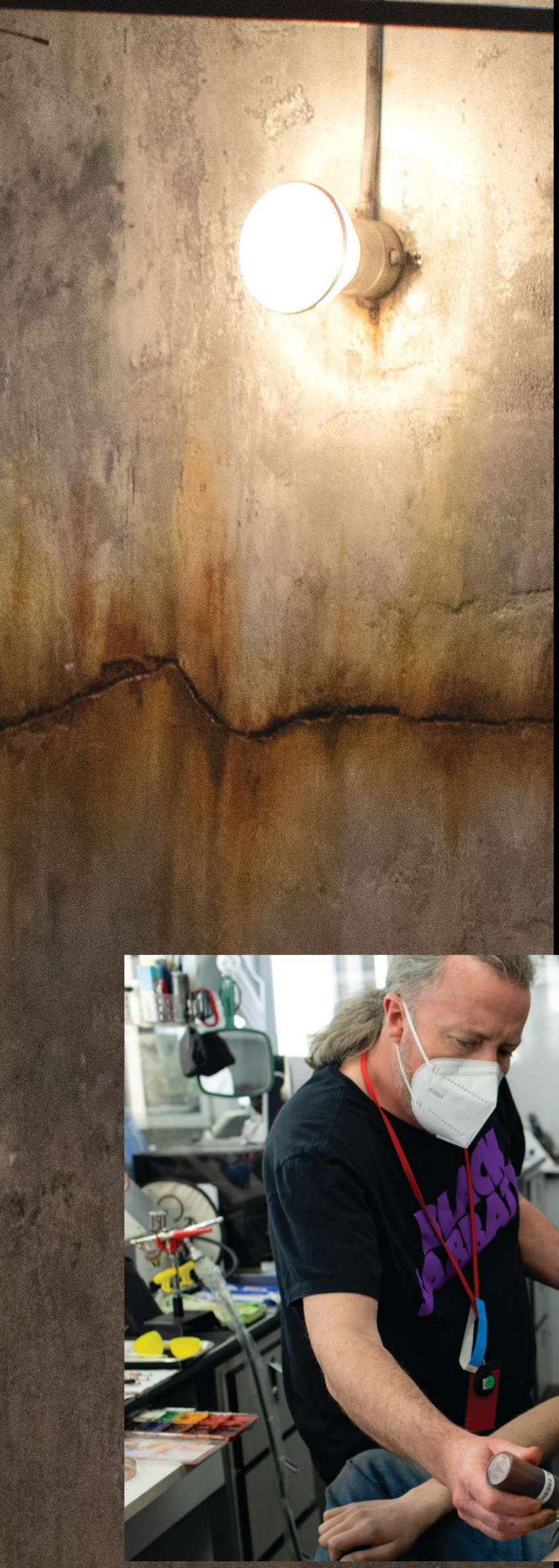
JH: Oh my God.

SD: It turned out his mother had been abducted and raped and murdered and wrapped in phone wire and thrown in a local lake. So, all these things were such a real presence in everybody's psyche, and I think that part of *The Black Phone* feeling for me was trying to capture the mystery of the Grabber. I wanted to capture the way a figure like that becomes almost mythological for the kids, something scary but also exciting, fascinating, and truly terrifying. I remember we were all afraid of who's gonna capture us on

IN REAL LIFE, AWFUL THINGS HAPPEN AND THERE'S NO WAY TO FIX THEM, BUT SOMETIMES WE CAN FIX IT IN STORIES.

SCOTT DERRICKSON HELPS MASON THAMES PLOT HIS NEXT MOVE.

PHOTOS COURTESY UNIVERSAL PICTURES / PHOTOS BY FRED NORRIS



the way to school, or who's gonna break into the house at night and kill us. That had become the reality that we were living with.

JH: I believed that if you thought about a serial killer, if you knew the name of a serial killer, if you thought about them too much, it would become a kind of psychic beacon, and they would find their way to you. I believed you could draw them in like you were sending a radio signal. This was a special kind of hell for an imaginative nine-year-old, because as soon as you had this thought, you couldn't not think about them. So, I always felt I was kind of radiating this presence that would draw someone in, someone who wanted to kill me.

CRC: We were all very screwed up by a lot of the stuff going on at the time! One of the things I was thinking about when writing this was the Adam Walsh murder. When Adam Walsh was killed, every kid in the country knew his name, knew how he died and knew the horrible story of how they found the body. Like, that was just the story every six-year-old kid in the United States knew, and it gave us all nightmares. That actually led to a line I wrote into the script: "You go being an unknown kid for so long, and then everyone knows your name." That's very much of the era we all grew up in.

SD: That line really affects people, Cargill. I've found a lot of people bringing that particular line up as being something that has a kind of primal power to it.

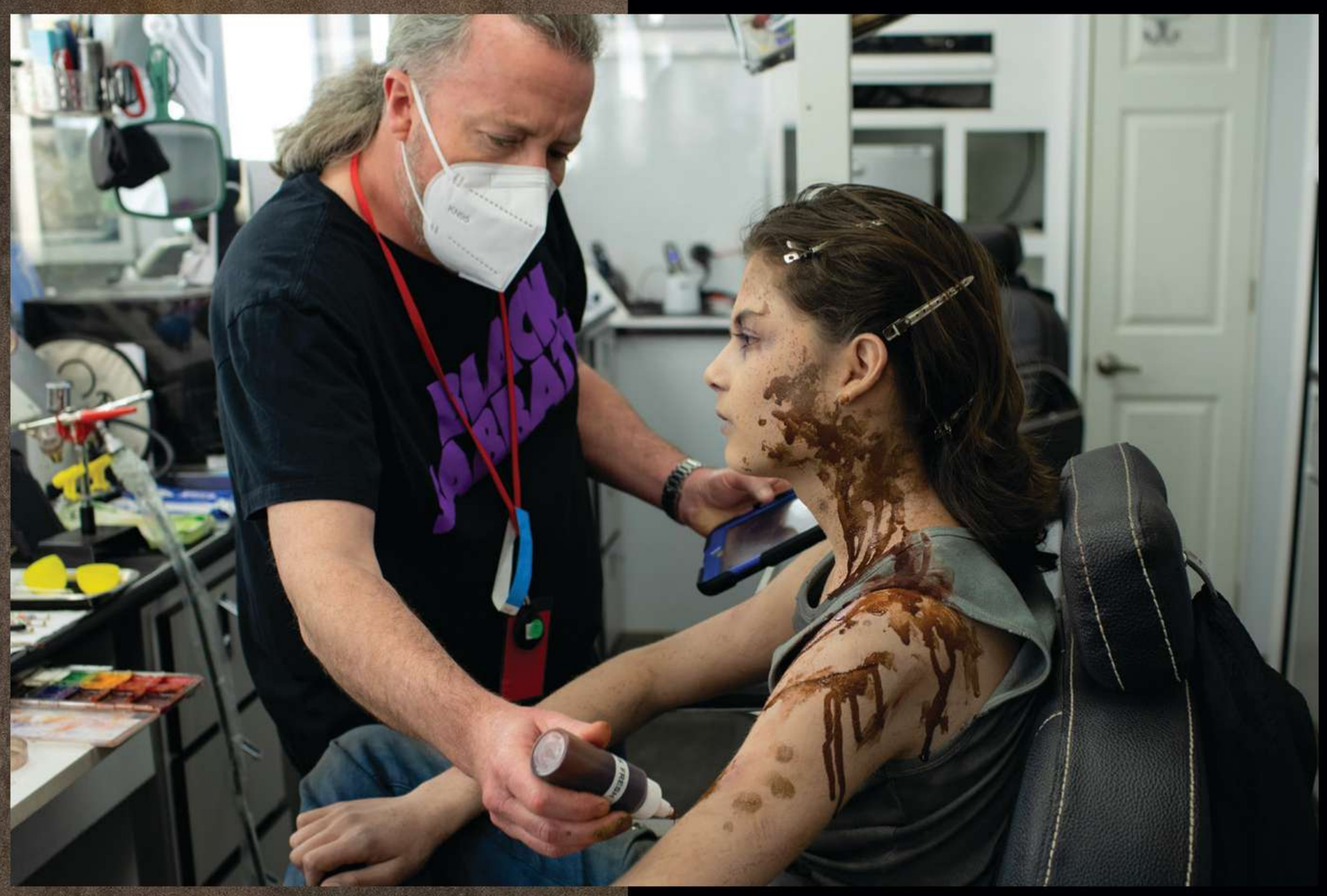
JH: I'll say this about the short story: It wanted to be a novel, but I kept fighting against that. I was working on a collection of short stories at the time, and didn't want [to write] a novel, so I kept pushing the urge back. The other thing is, by the time you guys tackled the material, you were both very mature, capable storytellers with a deft touch for plot. I was very young when I worked on "The Black Phone," really still finding my way, and I couldn't see how to extend the story without taking it to places I didn't want to go. So for me, it had to be a short story. I think it's interesting how you guys solved the puzzle of it to make it bigger, richer, more full of character and incident. You managed to give every one of the dead kids a full personality. You guys created a whole Goonies squad of kids, each of whom have their own story and wisdom to impart.

SD: And those kids, most of them are specific, but the characters themselves — at least the character of Robin (Miguel Cazarez Mora) and the character of Vance (Brady Hepner) — are characters that I specifically knew and remember vividly. There are a couple of lines in there that are word-for-word what I remember this kid saying to me when I was in elementary school, like the moment when Robin talks about the fight he just had in the bathroom. He was the toughest kid in school, and for some reason, he took a liking to me.

JH: Oh my God, I just realized the movie you guys have made is *My Bodyguard*, if the bodyguard was a ghost. Holy shit!

SD: That was a seminal movie for me when I was young.

CRC: Whenever I work on a script, I'll typically spend a weekend just watching a few movies that thematically go with what I'm working on, and *My Bodyguard* was in the batch of things I watched to warm up for *The Black Phone*. *My Bodyguard*. *Little Darlings*. *Stand By Me*, of course. I watched a whole mess of those together in one batch to try to get the tone right.



KEY MAKEUP ARTIST JASON WILLIS ROUGHS UP MIGUEL MORA (ABOVE) AND MICHAEL BANKS REPETA.

THE GRABBER (ETHAN HAWKE) WAITS (LEFT)… AND WATCHES.

PHOTOS COURTESY UNIVERSAL PICTURES

JH: Finney's sister Gwen [Madeleine McGraw] is so much fun in the film, so electrifying and completely fresh and so not what we're used to seeing. She's not a character we've seen.

SD: The best prose line in the script is a line that Cargill wrote, describing her character as the "sunshine in the apocalypse."

JH: In the short story, Gwen desperately wants to find her brother. She has this psychic vision, and she goes out on her bike, searching for him. And what she finds is the collection of black balloons that came out of the back of the van. They become snarled in a tree or telephone line, and that's all she's able to find her way to. I thought it was interesting and exciting that there was this nugget of a character in the story who then blooms into this enormous, energetic, fun personality in the movie. Finney and Gwen are the yin and yang of the story and the two emotional halves that piece the whole thing together. It's one of my favorite things about the film.

CRC: The chemistry between the two actors is what still floors me. Gwen is pure light, and Mason brings this incredible weight to the role that makes you think, "This kid has been through it." Whenever they're together, they just sparkle. Scott really did find the two right kids to bring this whole thing to life. I couldn't ask for two better actors in these roles.

JH: When I was a child, I got to know Tom Savini, and then, as a grownup, we re-encountered one another and became friends again. So, I talked to Tom, who helped design (*with Jason Baker — see p. 53*) the iconic mask Ethan Hawke wears throughout *The Black Phone*. It's an unforgettable, horrific visual, that mask. I talked to Tom Savini, and he said, "I have a rule for myself, one I decided a long time ago: I was never gonna do a film in which terrible exploitative things happened to the kids. I wasn't gonna do a film about a child killer, because I just don't wanna go there." And then he said, "But I read the script for *The Black Phone*, and I thought, 'This is different! This is a story about giving power back to people who've had their power taken away. It's a story about righting the cosmic scales and finding a way to show love and respect. You find the heroism in these kids in this story." He was very moved by that. And so he thought, "I really have to do this film."

MAKEUP DEPARTMENT HEAD RICK POUR TOUCHES UP THE GRABBER'S MUG.

PHOTO COURTESY UNIVERSAL PICTURES / PHOTO BY FRED NORRIS

SD: Ethan's not a big horror fan. He gets scared and was very hesitant to do *Sinister* because he thought the experience of making the movie would be too scary. [*laughs*] I told him, "No, no, no. Making a horror film's the funniest thing in the world." Which it really is. But when I showed him *The Black Phone*, he texted me a long response to it; he'd had a very powerful, personal reaction to the movie. He said, "The movie is so suspenseful and so scary, yet it's told entirely through the eyes of love. I don't think I've ever seen that done before," which to this point is probably my favorite thing that anybody has said to me about the movie.

JH: For a horror movie to succeed, it has to really be about warmth, not about coldness. It has to be about loving those characters and wanting them to survive or it doesn't work. It's just a pointless exercise. The warmth of the picture is its power. Its secret weapon. 💀

This conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

By Jason Baker

DIARY OF A MASK MAN

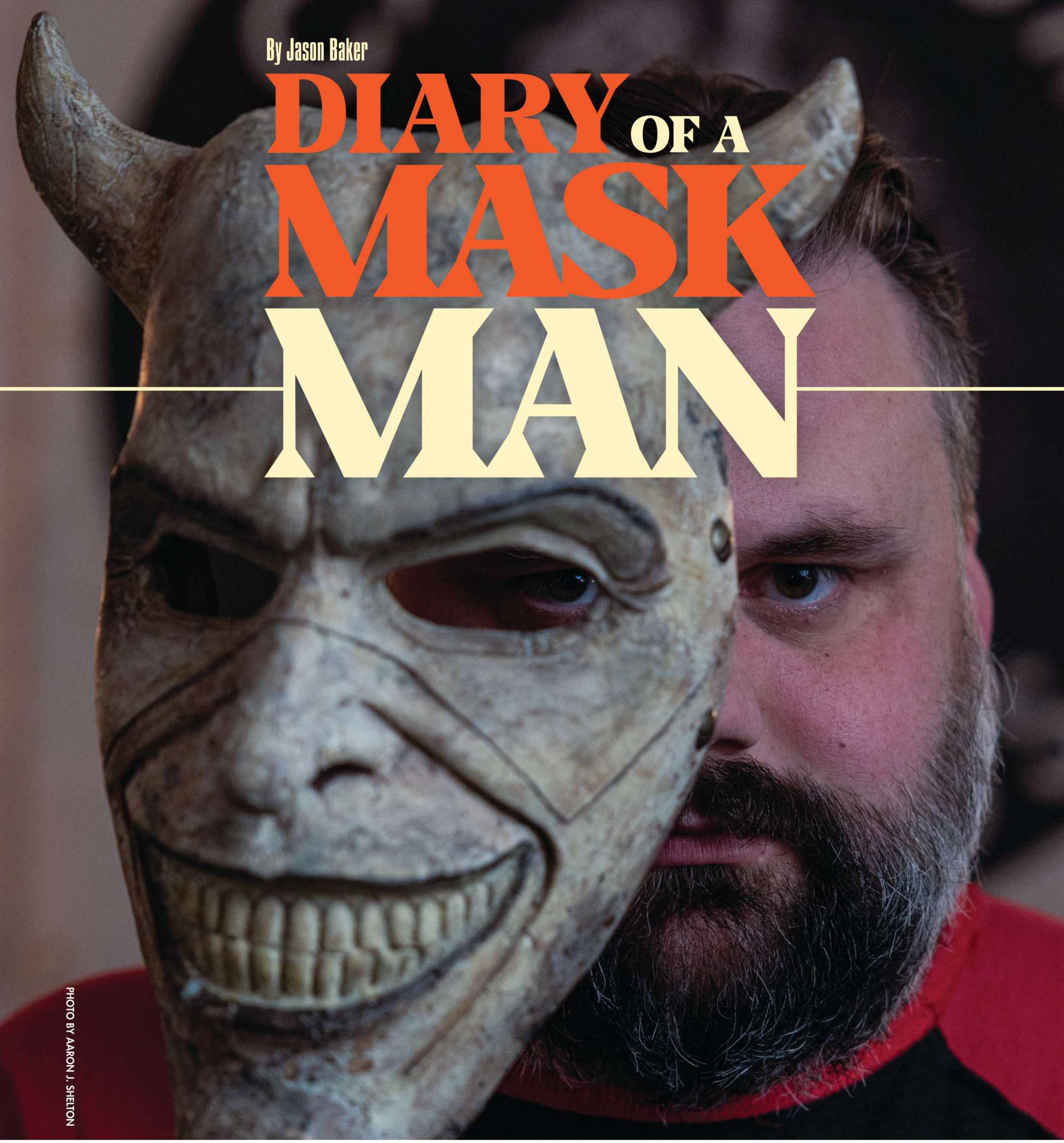


PHOTO BY AARON J. SHELTON

Tom Savini's right-hand man details how he and the FX master designed the Grabber's distinctive visage in THE BLACK PHONE.

How did Tom Savini and I get involved with *The Black Phone*? Short Answer: A trivia game.

Long Answer: In December of 2020, I received a message from Ryan Turek that simply read "What's your email?" My initial thought was "Damn, Turek's account got hacked. There's no way the guy behind some of the biggest modern horror movies wants to talk to me." But then I remembered I had already sent $5,000 to that Nigerian prince, so I said fuck it and hit him back.

(TOP) TOM SAVINI, BACK WHERE HE BELONGS: MAKING ICONIC MOVIE MONSTERS (AND IN THE PAGES OF FANGO); (RIGHT) THE AUTHOR AND LEAD SCULPTOR BRIAN MCGUIRE PRODUCE THE CHANGING FACES OF THE GRABBER.

Later, I got a call. It was Turek. "We're gearing up and we need some masks made. I love all the stuff that you and Savini have been doing lately. Interested?" "Of course," I replied.

Before I knew it Tom and I were pitching ideas to director Scott Derrickson, unsure if anything would come of it. It's an honor just to be nominated, right?

About a week later Gore Daddy Tom calls me. "Scott just called. He was playing a horror trivia game with his kids and one of the questions was: 'Which special effects legend was responsible for the iconic gore in the 1980 film *The Burning*?' He said that, plus the fact that he really liked our ideas, helped him make his decision. He wants us."

Tom and I started working with our concept artist. We compiled photos for reference: Danzig's Samhain mask, the masks from *Eyes Wide Shut*, Japanese *oni* masks, Roman theatre masks and so on. Once it was approved, we started the next phase: getting a life cast of Ethan Hawke. Ethan's schedule didn't allow him to travel to us, so we went to him. After that was done, it was clobbering time!

We collaborated with Scott during the entire process. He knew exactly what he wanted but was also open to suggestions. The main demands from him: 1) The aging of the masks must feel organic; 2) The mask should look like something the Grabber bought/found; 3) We must be able to see Ethan's eyes.

Once the dust cleared, we had made 25 Grabber masks in various forms. Some for up close, some for stunts, etc. During this time, we were also working with Bray Wyatt and Alexa Bliss at WWE, to whom we had just shipped an entire crate of materials and props. It never made it to Florida. The courier lost ALL of it, a nightmare scenario. So, when it came time to deliver the masks, we had no choice but to drive down and put them into Scott's hands ourselves. I personally drove from Pittsburgh, PA to NYC to Wilmington, NC, then back in the span of two days (worth it!)

My favorite moments from the experience:

1. While on set, I finally met Scott Derrickson in person. We shook hands and then realized we had shaken hands. I think his was the first hand I'd shaken since the pandemic started. The moment we realized what we had done, we both ran to the closest PA holding hand sanitizer.
2. It was only Ethan Hawke and me during his test fitting. (For the record, Ethan Hawke is arguably the nicest human I have ever met.) Once he put the first mask on and saw himself in the mirror, you could see the creative gears start to turn.
3. I got to create a modern Universal Monster for Blumhouse with Tom Fuckin' Savini!

Thank you again to our crew: Levi Simpson, Brian McGuire, Shawn Ronzio, Mandy Baker, and Kendra Bauer. Thank you, Ryan Turek, for not being a spam bot on my phone and for giving us this incredible opportunity. Finally, thank you Scott Derrickson for trusting us with your vision. Tom and I hope it… grabs viewers. 💀

PHOTOS BY AARON J. SHELTON

Kids' Stuff: HORROR'S CHILDHOOD CONNECTION

By Dr. James Francis, Jr.

A lot of horror movies showcase friends going camping, taking a road trip to go off the grid, or traveling abroad to foreign locales, often depicting the danger of the forest from folk and fairy tales where only the fittest or strongest survive. While partying college students heading into the woods for a good time aren't quite in the same demographic as Hansel and Gretel, they all take a similar journey into the unknown with good or curious intentions that go awry, and it's why so many horror films resonate with burgeoning horror fans in the same way that children's books do with the "normal" kids.

We see it in *House of 1000 Corpses* when an increasingly curious road trip forces Denise (Erin Daniels) to descend into the symbolic rabbit hole of Dr. Satan and The Professor's underground lair of horrors while dressed in an iconic blue-and-white frock à la *Alice in Wonderland*. Horror titles such as *The Tooth Fairy* likewise make their references overt, along with serial-killer favorites like the Pinocchio-esque *Child's Play*, *Jack Frost*'s winter wonderland of terror, and *The Gingerdead Man*.

The connection may also be inspired by folk and fairy tale structures, themes, and motifs. Horror's staple wandering band of psychopaths doesn't usually appear in children's literature, but it isn't much of a stretch to see *The Strangers* and *The Last House on the Left* as evolutions of *The Three Little Pigs* in which multiple symbolic wolves seek the perfect house to devour its inhabitants. Both children's fables and their metaphorical horror productions remind viewers that looks can be deceiving no matter which side of the door someone stands on; the wolf is almost always bad, but sometimes the pig isn't as innocent or helpless as the wolf thinks. The morality and cautionary tales over centuries fuel contemporary horror narratives that play out on the screen.

In the oral tradition of storytelling, adults shared folk and fairy tales among each other that were bawdy, violent closed narratives. Many of us immediately access The Brothers Grimm as a reference, but the tales had social lives of their own before they were codified by the likes of them or Charles Perrault. France and Germany helped pave the way with many of these stories shared in salons, and their content altered depending on regional and cultural influences. But the fascinating aspect is that the stories made their way to children, unfiltered, which contemporary parents (think mostly American) would typically avoid exposing to their kids.

Unlike our generalized separation of child and adult across various cultures, childhood as its own stage of development or autonomous concept had yet to be defined when the oral tales were in circulation. It wasn't until the Enlightenment period and the appearance of Romanticism that children were considered innocent of the world, requiring protection from adult vices, experiences, and knowledge of the ills that exist in their immediate environments. This shift in

understanding human development aided the creation of more family-friendly tales that contained some scary content but offered its younger audience a reprieve before "The End." Because of this, a lot of kids grow up "in the know" about shared children's stories. But, as Nicki Minaj reminds us in the opening spoken-word lyrics to Kanye West's "Dark Fantasy," "You might think you've peeped the scene / You haven't, the real one's far too mean / The watered-down one, the one you know / Was made up centuries ago."

Early versions of *Little Red Riding Hood* simply end with Grandma and Little Red being consumed by the wolf; the reader is advised in a clause at the end of the story to never trust a wolf. In other versions, Little Red turns the tables on the beast, sometimes tricking him to consume a bunch of rocks which leads to his slow and painful demise. On the other hand, one of the more common versions of *Little Red Riding Hood* features the woodsman violently cutting open the belly of the wolf which allows Little Red and Grandma to jump out, paving the way to a happily-ever-after ending.

In film, *Freeway* tells the tale of Vanessa Lutz (Reese Witherspoon) and Bob Wolverton (Kiefer Sutherland) as a contemporary, urban version of *Little Red Riding Hood*. The story involves mature subject matter — sex work, drug abuse, incest, child pornography, gun violence — but the framework functions as an update of the folktale told to millions of children. We also see a reversal of the tale in *Hard Candy* with Elliot Page and Patrick Wilson representing Little Red and The Big Bad Wolf, respectively.

So many of us know and celebrate Disney's *The Little Mermaid*, a children's film that offers music, vibrant colors, and a villain that gets defeated by true love. In the Hans Christian Andersen tale, however, Ariel suffers physical pain by trading in her mer-tail for legs; she is also tasked to kill the man she loves, who marries another person in order to return to the sea as a mermaid. In the end, she doesn't live happily ever after; she dies. These darker story elements were presented to children in the early years of the 19th century because kids weren't seen nor treated as different than adults during that time.

Although Disney's version differs from the Andersen tale in many respects, both the original and adapted essences of the story bypass childhood to become adult-oriented in *The Lure*, *Cold Skin*, and *The Lighthouse*. Each film offers its own unique perspective on how men would really treat mermaids if they actually encountered one, and none of them exude benevolent, prince-like behavior.

While earlier folklore and children's stories generally romanticize regional locales — most often rural — the horror film flips such idyllic environments to reveal their maniacal underbelly. Roald Dahl's *James and the Giant Peach* is an adventure-fantasy narrative in which the protagonist encounters diverse characters and dangerous situations on a trip from England to New York. While the Cloud-Men in the story impede the journey and frighten James and company, the group reaches its NY destination unharmed, transformed for the better, and all ends well. The story structure directly correlates to horror offerings from *The Hills Have*

While earlier folklore and children's stories generally romanticize regional locales — most often rural — the horror film flips such idyllic environments to reveal their maniacal underbelly.

Eyes and *Tourist Trap* to *Hostel*, *Turistas*, *The Ruins*, and *Aftershock*. Like James' escape from a not-so-great living situation to newfound happiness, most of these movies represent travel narratives meant to provide a form of escape for the main characters, either from the boredom of daily routine life (usually to party) or tragedy, such as Dani's getaway to Sweden in *Midsommar*. Nothing ends well, but the characters are certainly forever changed because of the experience.

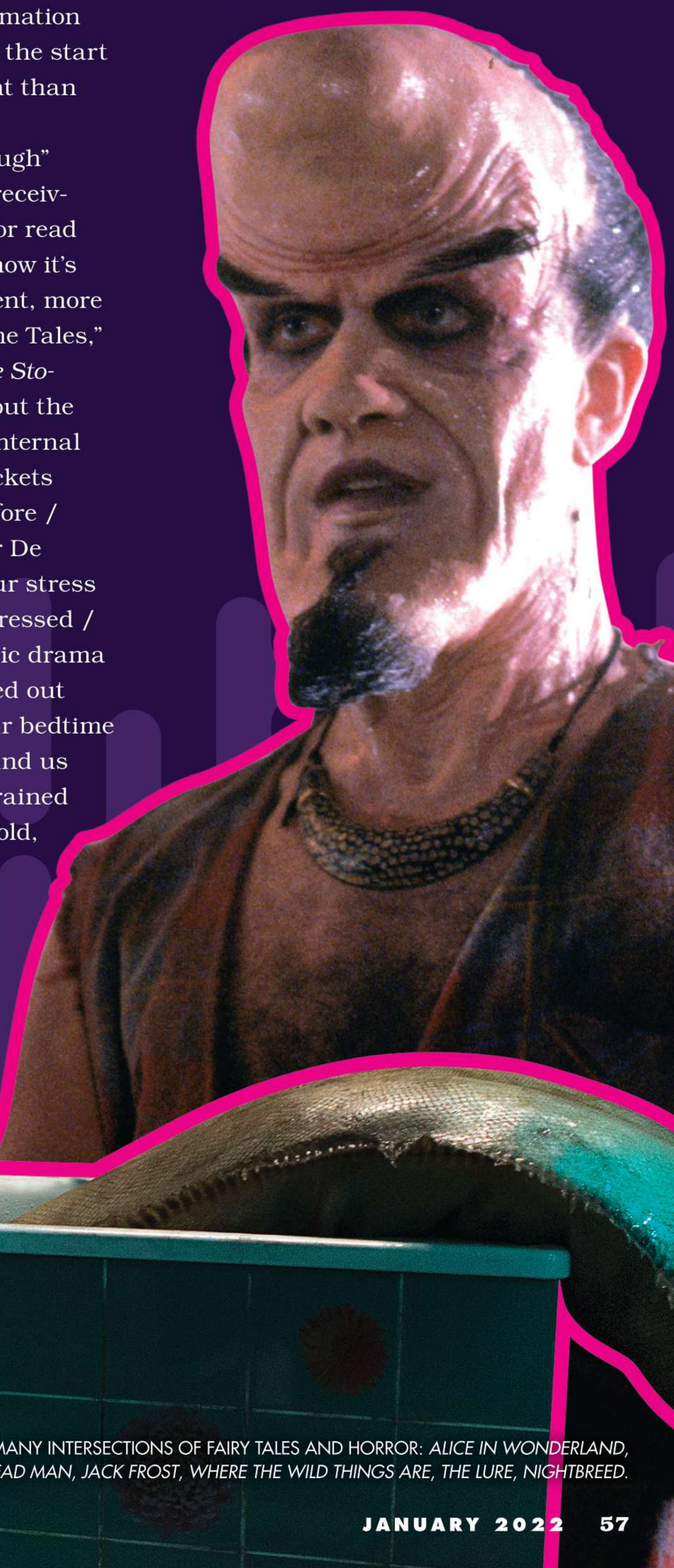
Last, but certainly not least, the memorable villains that stand the test of time, who owe their iconic status to early folklore and children's literature. *A Nightmare on Elm Street*'s Freddy Krueger offers audiences a classic trickster character and a murderous imp. This becomes more pronounced as the franchise develops over time; Freddy starts to laugh more and takes his time with torture once the series reaches *Dream Warriors* in '87. Much like Bugs Bunny, Freddy enjoys toying with his victims; the only difference is if Freddy drops an anvil on someone's head, that's curtains. Horror takes the nostalgia of childhood — even from a seemingly innocuous cartoon — and twists the fond memories into stories full of legitimate danger with concerns of bodily harm, mental degradation, and, of course, death.

In *Nightbreed*, audiences journey to a land made possible by Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*. This community of "monsters" rumble with each other and engage in wild ruckuses; however, they typically only demonstrate aggression toward outsiders. Max receives a frightful welcoming when he reaches the island in Sendak's picturebook, comparable to Boone (Craig Sheffer) and his first confrontational interactions with the Nightbreed. Boone eventually acculturates to the community, much like Max's development as he learns that maturation and transformation (becoming more than he is at the start of the story) is more important than power or control.

By the time we're "old enough" to watch a horror film, we're receiving the same story we heard or read when we were younger.

By the time we're "old enough" to watch a horror film, we're receiving the same story we heard or read when we were younger, only now it's been transformed for a different, more mature audience. Per "Bedtime Tales," the opening song to *Deadtime Stories*, "Some call it obscene / but the violence on screen / fits the internal turmoil of drama / Those buckets of gore / were spilled ages before / George Romero, Hitchcock, or De Palma / And our fears and our stress / throughout time's been expressed / through the fairy tale symbolic drama / It's no wonder why we turned out like we did / remembering our bedtime tales as kids." The lyrics remind us that our childhood fears, ingrained in us by the stories we were told, become adult fascinations in the form of horror.

So, the next time a scary movie really gets under your skin, think back to when you were younger. The monster hiding under your bed or the one staring at you from the darkened closet never left; it simply grew older with you. 💀



(THIS PAGE AND PREVIOUS:) THE MANY INTERSECTIONS OF FAIRY TALES AND HORROR: *ALICE IN WONDERLAND, THE GINGERDEAD MAN, JACK FROST, WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE, THE LURE, NIGHTBREED.*

By Rich Johnson | Illustration by Vanessa McKee

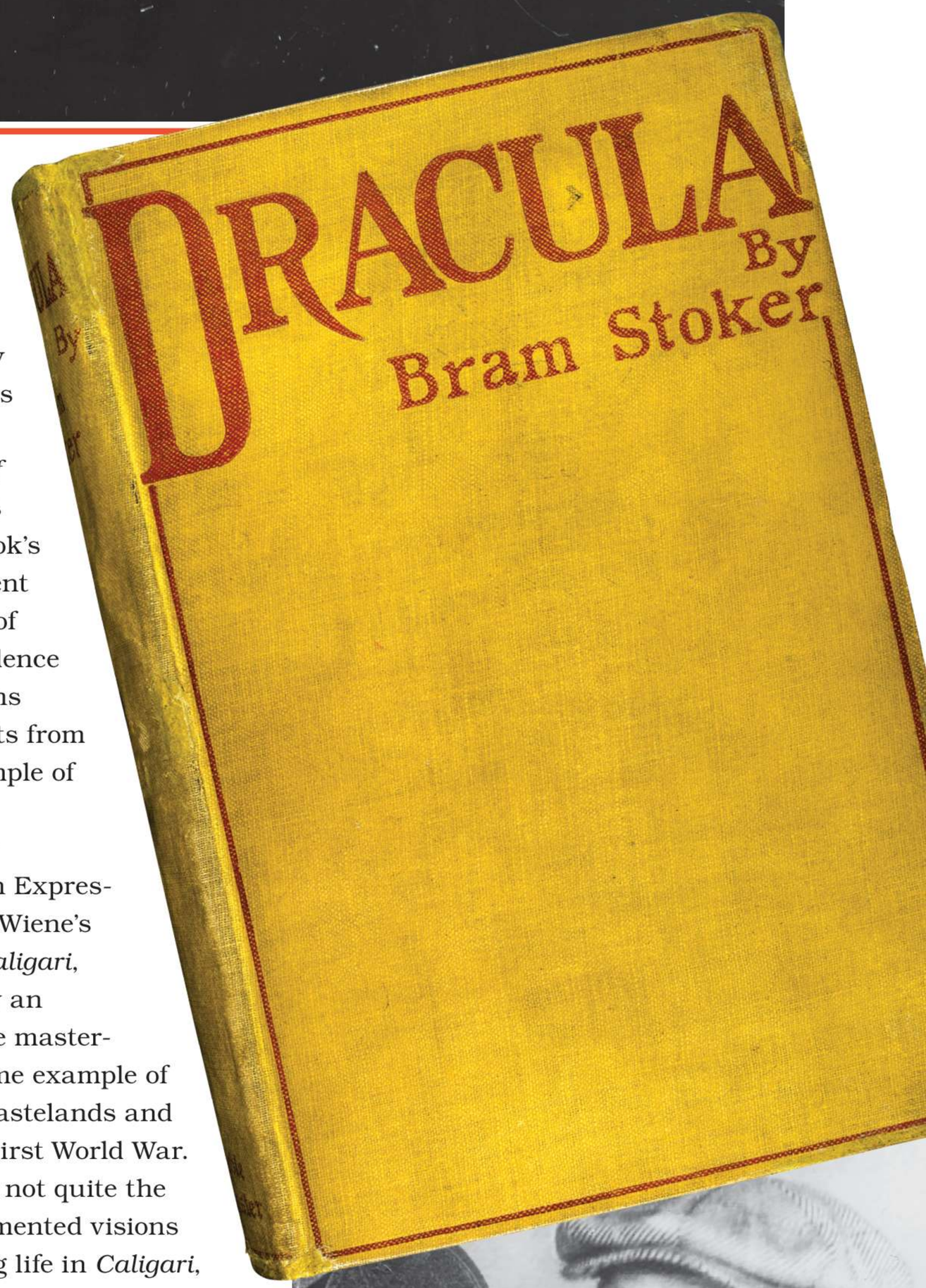
NOSFERATU AT 100

A century after the release of F.W. Murnau's masterpiece, its themes and subtext are no less relevant.

From the silver screen (and screams) of the silent era through the Golden Age of cinema, the list of vampire movies is an endless night. F.W. Murnau's legendary 1922 film *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror* left an indelible mark on the film industry. It single-handedly set the template for all future vampire films while simultaneously reinventing the lore that surrounded the mythological nightmares.

As far as unofficial adaptations of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* go, *Nosferatu* is the most notorious. Its reputation, however, goes far beyond the controversies of copyright infringement. At its core, the film is an important work of fiction that dismantled the vampire myth as it existed at the time, controversially addressed notions of sickness and queerness through deeply problematic racial stereotypes, and served as an insidious portrait of disease and foreign invasion cloaked in immortality. To watch it is to understand how Count Orlok isn't simply a monster, but rather a loathsome creature created and sustained by the zeitgeist of the time.

THE HISTORY



The producer of *Nosferatu*, Albin Grau, was more than a little *familiar* with Bram Stoker's 1897 novel, taking a somewhat naïve (or arrogant) approach to "altering" *Dracula*. Bankruptcy followed Murnau's presumably ill-fated production when, on the release of the film, a lawsuit was filed from Stoker's widow, Florence Stoker; she had ordered that all existing negatives of *Nosferatu* were to be destroyed. If several prints had not been carefully smuggled out of Germany, she would have succeeded. *Nosferatu* would have been lost forever, altering the course of vampiric cinema and potentially leading to an unrecognizable horror landscape.

Although Murnau is often considered the main driving force behind *Nosferatu*, it was actually Grau's experience during the First World War that served as the primary genesis for the film beyond *Dracula*. While serving with the German army in Serbia, a local farmer told him a terrifying story about having seen an "undead" in Romania. As the story goes, it was the local man's own father who had risen from the grave as a vampire, killing people in the village. In order to end his father's reign of terror, the villagers put a stake through his heart to ensure he was dead.

The story would wind up in a 1921 article by Grau in the German magazine *Bühne Und Film* (*Stage and Film*), presumably as a publicity stunt; the authenticity of that particular story has always been questionable and has never been properly verified. Despite this, Grau's artistic contributions to *Nosferatu* were undeniable. He drew inspiration for the film's visual aesthetic from Hugo Steiner-Prag's illustrations for Gustav Meyrink's 1915 novel *The Golem*. That style echoed throughout Grau's iconic production design, including the sets, costumes, and striking makeup.

An artist, architect, and occultist, Grau's devout interest as a member of the Pansophical Lodge and German magical order emphasized his presumably sinister leanings. His inner circles linked him to the Great Beast himself, Aleister Crowley, who had already founded the religious movement Thelema through *The Book of the Law* in 1904. It's said that Count Orlok's encrypted letters, sent during the first act of *Nosferatu*, show evidence of quasi-secret glyphs inspired by occultists from the Order of the Temple of the East.

Alongside other examples of German Expressionism like Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, *Nosferatu* is not only an undisputed macabre masterpiece but also a prime example of art born from the wastelands and broken men of the First World War. Grau's designs were not quite the modernist and fragmented visions brought to terrifying life in *Caligari*, but both films share a scarred mindset with figures paralyzed by the grip of death. In *Nosferatu*, in particular, characters often sleepwalk through scenes in a shell-shocked trance, evoking the terror of a defeated Weimar Republic haunted by corpses.

As a horror movie, *Nosferatu* goes beyond the analogy of war. Count Orlok (Max Schreck) is presented as a plague carrier, a living analogy for the origin of the Great Influenza, with its own disturbing parallel to current times. It leans towards a more infectious representation of Stoker's source material rather than what we would come to know as Count Dracula. Here, the suave womanizer we came to associate with Lugosi and Lee's portrayals of the iconic villain is replaced by something cancerous and insidious. There is also an undeniable predatory nature, much like the roaming hyena, "almost but a phantom," a reminder of life and death; a medieval bestiary that lends the landscape a dark and distinctive soul.

MURNAU AND HIS PURLOINED SOURCE MATERIAL.

THE OTHER

F.W. Murnau's scandalous death at age 42 made headlines in 1931 when his car crashed on the Pacific Coast Highway. It wasn't the accident itself that raised eyebrows, however, but rather the fact that it happened while being driven by a 14-year-old Filipino servant.

Murnau was gay but never openly so, and the major scandal stemmed from the presumption that they were having sex at the time of the accident. The boy, Garcia Stevenson, had been driving. Two others were in the car at the time and survived, but the scandal had done its damage. Only 11 people attended Murnau's funeral.

Controversial in life (and death), Murnau was very much positioned as an outsider. There is an argument to be made that his being gay directly influenced his portrayal of Count Orlok in *Nosferatu*. And while his queerness may validate his depiction of his own Otherness, it doesn't excuse him of racist rhetoric. Whether inadvertently or deliberately, Count Orlok is a character mired in antisemitic tropes. The fact *Nosferatu* was also written by Henrik Galeen (*Der Golem*, 1920), himself a Jew, of course, makes this a more complex situation.

Murnau's romanticism and visual poetry act as somewhat of a veneer as we lose ourselves in his bleak and mystical landscapes, a direct ode to 19th-century German romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich's "The Monk by the Sea." *Nosferatu*'s tragic heroine, Ellen (Greta Schröder), is even preyed upon within the deliberate framing of Henry Fuseli's famous oil painting, "The Nightmare."

The truth, however, and its impact lies in the subtext. Count Orlok is presented as a creature that invades the German homeland and preys on the public's anxieties. There is a palpable fear of the Other who, in this case, is represented as a stereotypically Jewish immigrant. Orlok is presented with the same offensively caricatured hooked nose that would come to be used as a weapon against the Jewish people of Europe. This depiction still draws uncomfortable parallels to the violent antisemitism that festered across Northern Europe during the inter-war years. German society believed their economy was "bled dry" by Jewish businesses, a scapegoat for the rapid inflation that got Germany back on its feet following the war. Even Orlok's voracious acquisition of property is rooted in these long-standing antisemitic prejudices and harmful stereotypes of Jewish greed.

But it doesn't stop there. Early 20th-century satire often depicted caricatures of Jewish immigrants as "vermin." The replacement of Dracula's transformation into a bat with Orlok transforming into a rat becomes a glaringly obvious and insidious design.

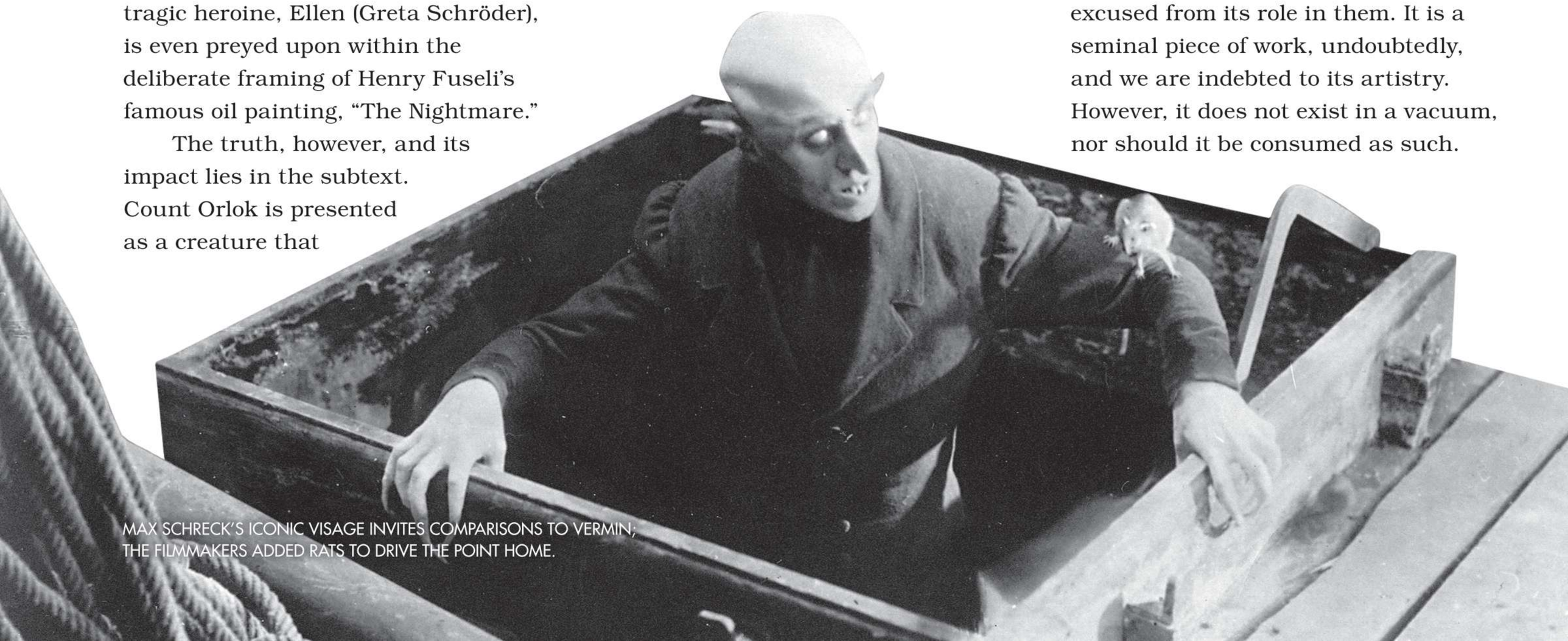
With this undeniable imagery comes the monstrous notion of "blood libel" that stemmed from the middle ages. Jewish people were accused of drinking the blood of Christians, children especially, and using their blood to make Passover matzo. It persists to this day.

Include Stoker's Shylock-inspired depiction of Dracula, and the eventual publication of *Mein Kampf* — "that race which shuns the sunlight" — damaging accusations and references to Jews as vampires, bloodsuckers, and parasites over the centuries have caused irreparable harm. With all of this in mind, it would seem that contagions have become the vampire's breeding ground over the centuries as much as xenophobia, and seems to flourish during periods of instability.

It is no different in the current climate wherein xenophobic fear-mongering and scapegoating are used to weaponize derogatory terms like the "Wuhan virus" and absurd notions that Jewish people were responsible for COVID-19. They stem from heinous conspiracy theories that explode in inflammatory tweetstorms.

Otherness has always been about non-conformity and persecution. It is often dismissed as a physical or moral sickness that ostracizes and, in turn, transforms minorities into terrifying foreign bodies; diseased, queer monsters who instill fear and tarnish the "Dream," whatever that may be. At its core, *Nosferatu* should demonstrate the deconstruction of damaging stereotypes where antisemitic subtext has possessed some audiences while intensifying such fear and hatred.

There is no escaping these potent conversations, and *Nosferatu* is not excused from its role in them. It is a seminal piece of work, undoubtedly, and we are indebted to its artistry. However, it does not exist in a vacuum, nor should it be consumed as such.



MAX SCHRECK'S ICONIC VISAGE INVITES COMPARISONS TO VERMIN; THE FILMMAKERS ADDED RATS TO DRIVE THE POINT HOME.

THE LEGACY

A natural progression from *Nosferatu* is Carl Theodor Dreyer's *Vampyr*. Both are poetic nightmares. Dreyer moves towards a limbo state, trapped between life and death, dream and reality. Grau's distinctive use of texture, atmosphere and ghoulish imagery can also be seen four decades later in *Carnival of Souls*, just six years before Romero's revisionist zombie movies and grounded treatment of the vampire in *Martin*. Diving a little deeper, tenuous links can be made via Bava-inspired vampire planets and the Orlok composure of the Xenomorph stalking another Ellen (this time Ripley) in Ridley Scott's *Alien*.

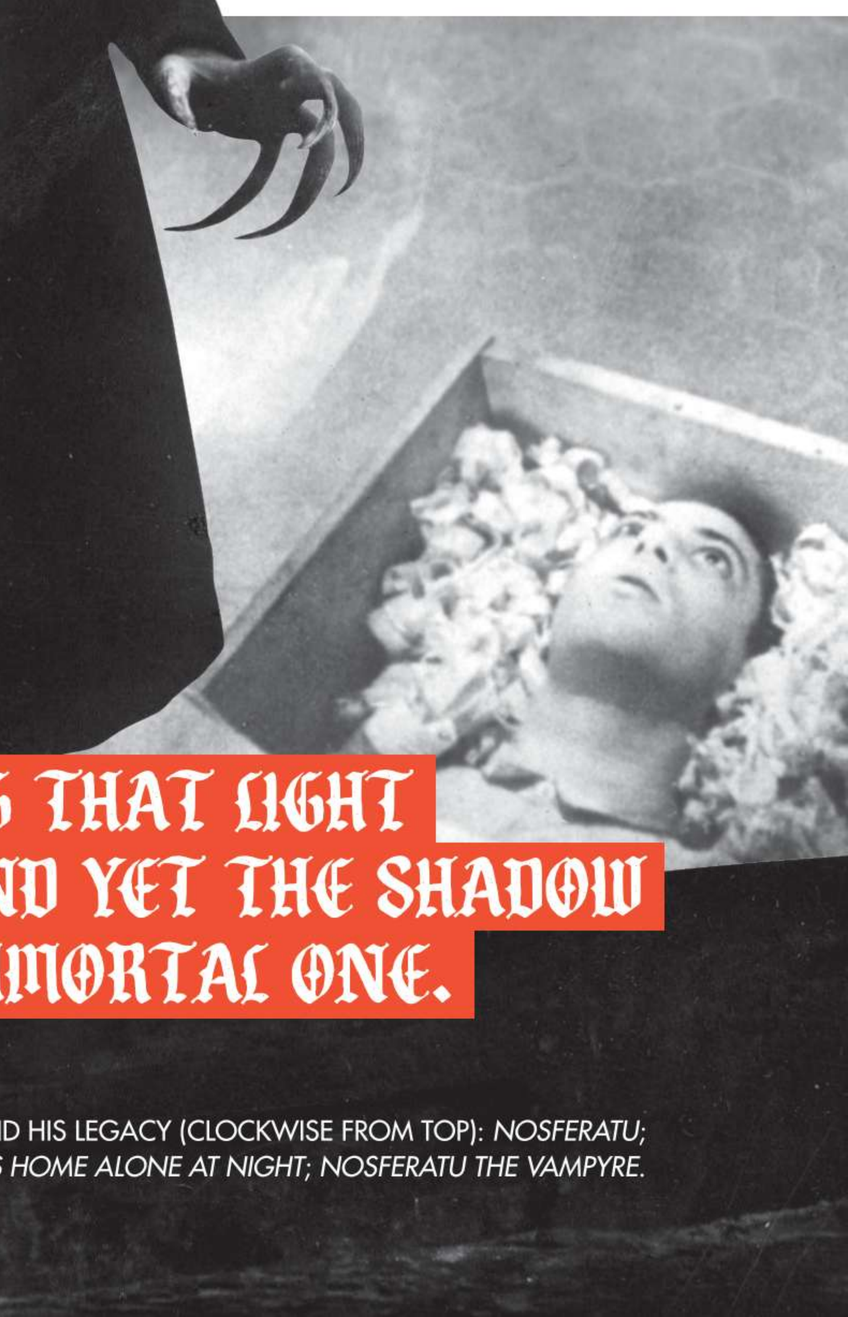
Though it's merely glimpsed in *King of New York*, Abel Ferrara's respect for *Nosferatu* is all over *The Addiction*. During this period, the vampire's disease was depicted as being AIDS and drug addiction, which sees the central character of Ferrara's film, Kathleen (Lili Taylor), literally shoot up on the red stuff.

Ana Lily Amirpour's *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* is also cut from familiar cloth; displaying the power of black and white nightmares draped in fearful shadows that color often fails to grasp. As Grau once wrote, "Through shadow, dark and invisible forces become visible," highlighted by Murnau expert Luciano Berriatúa in his inspired documentary, *The Language of Shadows*.

The iconic film was remade as Werner Herzog's *Nosferatu the Vampyre* in 1979, and the original *Nosferatu* footage was recently rotoscoped in *Nosferatu: Re-Animated* in 2020. Robert Eggers, whose most recent release, *The Lighthouse*, acted as an unearthed relic and love letter to lost film, is also set to breathe new life into the infamous Count Orlok with a remake starring Anya Taylor-Joy. Over the years, Orlok's distinctive look has reappeared as an homage in *Salem's Lot*, *What We Do in the Shadows*, and, most recently, *Jakob's Wife*.

Perhaps the reason Max Schreck's haunting performance remains so powerful is not only because of his terrifying silhouette and grotesque features (his surname is a translation of "terror"), but also in how little is known about the actor. This led to an urban legend that he actually was a vampire. This inspired E. Elias Merhige's *Shadow of the Vampire*, which explored the premise as a lavish black comedy wherein Murnau (John Malkovich) had to deal with Schreck's (Willem Dafoe) insatiable appetite for his co-stars and the production crew. A work of genius, Merhige manages to cap a decade of peak '90s vampire movies while respectfully serving horror history as entertainment.

"Blood is life!" But to Grau and Murnau, death resided in dark places. Take the iconic moment during the final scene of *Nosferatu* as Orlok's shadowed talon clasps Ellen's heart. Rarely has such use of lighting been topped. It seems somewhat fitting that light destroys this monster, and yet the shadow he has left behind is an immortal one. It has cast its disturbing and complicated influence for 100 years and will continue to do so for hundreds more. 💀

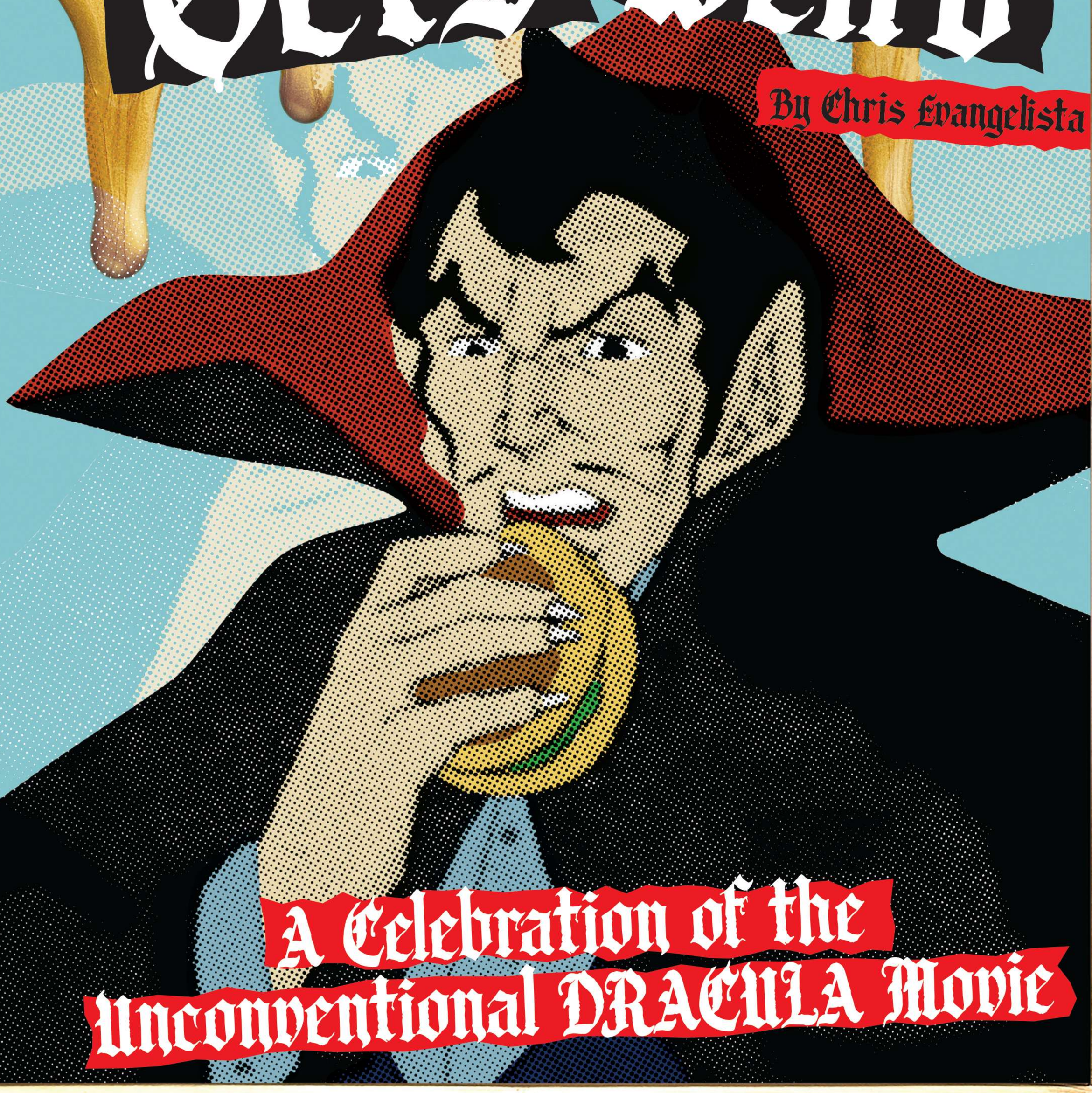


IT SEEMS SOMEWHAT FITTING THAT LIGHT DESTROYS THIS MONSTER, AND YET THE SHADOW HE HAS LEFT BEHIND IS AN IMMORTAL ONE.

A TRAILBLAZER AND HIS LEGACY (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP): *NOSFERATU; VAMPYR; A GIRL WALKS HOME ALONE AT NIGHT; NOSFERATU THE VAMPYRE.*

Dracula gets Weird

By Chris Evangelista



A Celebration of the Unconventional DRACULA Movie

When you think of Dracula, familiar images likely fill your mind: gothic castles, heavy fog, billowing capes, and exposed necks. The tropes are well-established, likely because there are so many of them. Bram Stoker's undead icon has stalked the screen for nearly 100 years, so we all know the deal by now.

We may picture different Counts — Bela Lugosi, Christopher Lee, Frank Langella, Gary Oldman — but the end results are the same. Except when they aren't.

Despite the familiar entries, there are weird outliers. The bastard cousins and red-headed step-children that don't quite fit in. Unconventional Draculas.

And why not? The most famous *Dracula* movie from 1931 with Lugosi is a pale shadow of Stoker's novel to begin with. If the blueprint we've come to know is inherently different from its source material, why shouldn't other entries follow suit?

Dracula is a traveler. While Transylvania may be where he hangs his cape, he's fond of sailing toward new lands for fresh blood. Traditionally, the Count heads to the United Kingdom. In William Beaudine's 1966 *Billy the Kid Versus Dracula*, however, he's off to the Old West.

As played by the perpetually-old John Carradine, *Billy the Kid*'s Dracula is something of a dandy, sporting a top hat, ruffled shirt, and string necktie. He sets his sights on the beautiful young Betty Bentley (Melinda Plowman), but he'll have some competition since Betty is the girlfriend of legendary outlaw Billy the Kid (Chuck Courtney).

Haunted by an overabundance of theremin music, *Billy the Kid* is an absolute disaster. The Count *could* fare well in a Western setting; Stoker even threw a cowboy character into his book. But this movie isn't interested in doing anything remotely exciting with this scenario, and why should it? It's designed for double features at drive-ins. People were supposed to be necking (how appropriate) by the time the opening credits rolled. Or rather *swooped*, since they unfolded via a cartoon bat that swung across the screen.

Star John Carradine has 351 credits to his name, but when asked which of those titles was the worst, he didn't hesitate to name *Billy the Kid Versus Dracula*. "It was a bad film," said the man who stalked around dusty Western sets in a satin-lined cape. "I don't even remember it. I was absolutely numb."

After his trip to the Old West, he heads to 1970s New York City in the comic farce *Love at First* Bite. An exceedingly okay movie, *Love at First Bite* has the perpetually tan George Hamilton as its Dracula, which seems a bit odd since the character isn't a fan of sunbathing.

Love at First Bite sets up its cheeky, charming narrative by having the Count kicked out of his ancestral home by Communist Romania. What's an ancient vampire to do when he's displaced by Communists? Head to disco-heavy, sex-positive '70s NYC, of course.

1988's *Nosferatu in Venice* was an Italian production meant to be a sequel to Werner Herzog's N*osferatu*

the Vampyre. But the temperamental Klaus Kisnki, reprising his role, refused to shave his head and put on the ghoulish make-up he wore in 1979. Instead, he opted to stumble around a misty Venice with long flowing hair, looking simultaneously bored and insane.

Production on *Nosferatu in Venice* was an absolute nightmare, with several actresses alleging assault from Kinski. Though the film wants to make its vampire romantic, Kinski's sleaziness keeps that from happening. The characterization feels more in line with Stoker's original Dracula — pure, menacing evil instead of a sexy aristocrat.

As William Crain's 1972 blaxploitation horror film *Blacula* begins, Prince Mamuwalde (William Marshall) meets with the wealthy Count Dracula (Charles Macaulay) in 1780 with the hopes of convincing him to help end the slave trade. Dracula, clearly not an abolitionist, laughs the request off, turning Mamuwalde into a vampire.

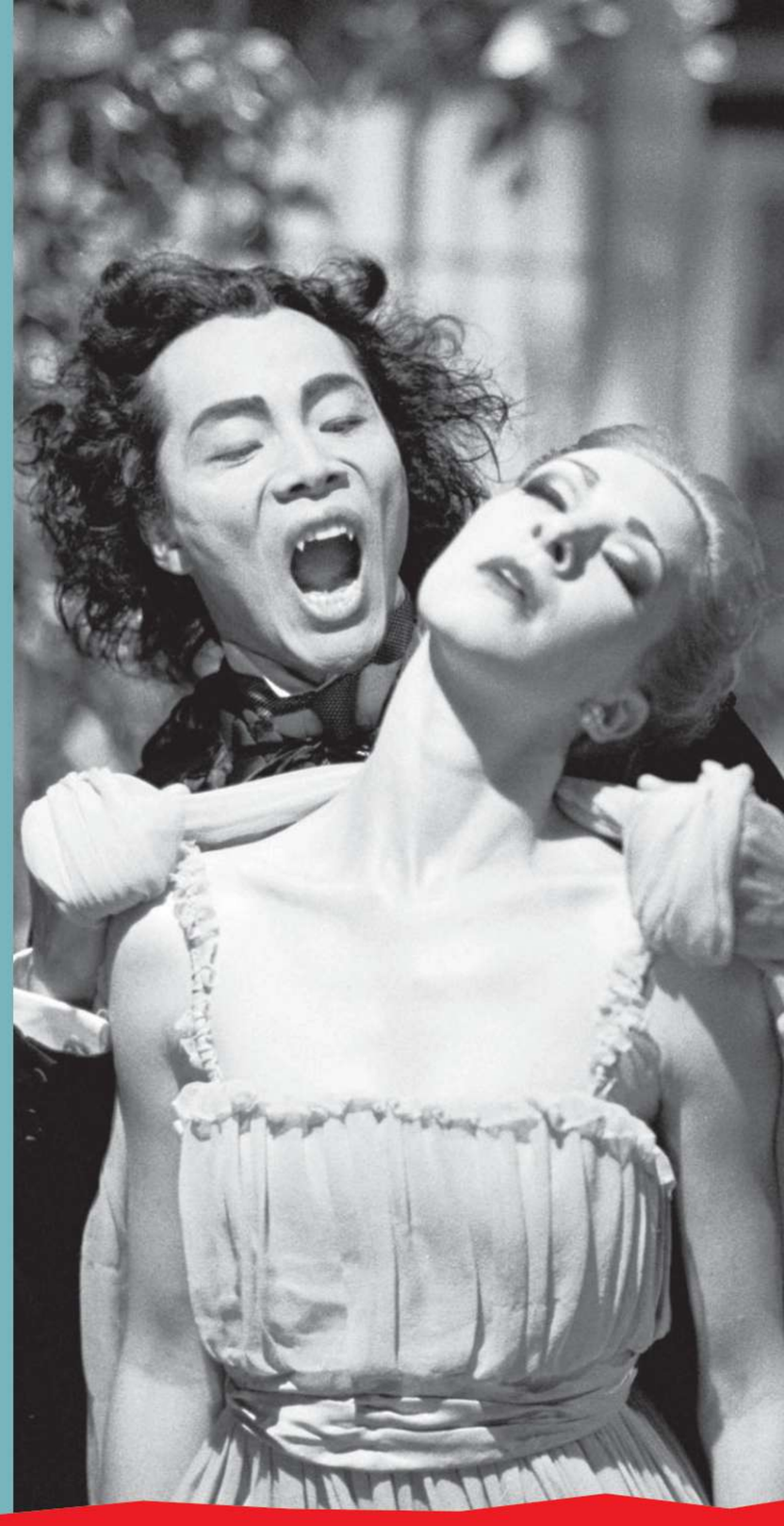
An evil Dracula cameo also features in *Deafula*, the first — and so far only — American horror film made entirely in American Sign Language (ASL). Released in 1975, *Deafula* has a cast speaking ASL while voiceovers supply dialogue for hearing viewers. The plot involves a student named Steve (Peter Wolf, who also directed the movie under his real name, Peter Wechsberg) who realizes he's a vampire and begins murdering people in his small town. Dracula doesn't appear until near the end of the film, and the voiceover actor's Lugosi impression is so awful your face turns red with second-hand embarrassment.

Dracula is a full-blown hero in the bonkers 1980 anime, *Dracula: Sovereign of the Damned*. Based on Marvel's *The Tomb of Dracula* comics, *Sovereign of the Damned* opens with Dracula impersonating Satan in order to pull a fast one on some dopey devil worshippers and abscond with a young woman meant to be sacrificed. Dracula and this sacrificial virgin quickly fall for each other. At one point, the anime Dracula — in his very recognizable costume — wanders into a diner and eats a burger in total silence. Let's see Bela Lugosi try *that*.

More Dracula heroics abound in *The Night Dracula Saved the World*, a 1979 Halloween TV special originally titled *The Halloween That Almost Wasn't*, and Dracula is played by *Taxi* veteran Judd Hirsch. Hirsch is a parody of the Count, adopting the generic Lugosi accent that has become synonymous with the character. But he's not some evil fiend; he's just a guy who loves Halloween, and when the holiday is endangered, he sets out to save it. He eventually does, and then he rips off his tuxedo and cape to reveal he's dressed exactly like John Travolta in *Saturday Night Fever*.

Disco dancing ensues.

When Dracula isn't doing the hustle, he's performing ballet. Guy Maddin's 2002 *Dracula: Pages from a Virgin's Diary* finds Canada's Royal Winnipeg Ballet company setting Stoker's classic story to dance. Filmed to resemble a silent movie, Maddin's Dracula — and the Royal Winnipeg Ballet's production — leans into the xenophobia baked into Stoker's book.



Dracula's been to The Old West (*Billy the Kid Versus Dracula*, opposite left), Manhattan (*Love at First Bite*, opposite right), the opera (*Dracula: Pages from a Virgin's Diary*, above) and Italy (*Nosferatu in Venice*, below).

Maddin's title cards splash across the screen, screaming about the fear of foreigners, with the Count himself played by Royal Winnipeg Ballet Principal Dancer Zhang Wei-Qiang (now known as Johnny W. Chang). Watching his vampire twirl across a smokey stage with his long, flowing curly hair is downright mesmerizing. It's easy to see why anyone would offer him their throat.

After being reimagined as Judas Iscariot (*Dracula 2000*) and sent to space (*Dracula 3000*), the Count's chaotic cinematic journey is far from over. Oscar-winner Chloe Zhao is at work on a new *Dracula* movie that's being described as a "futuristic, sci-fi Western," and it's probably safe to assume it'll turn out better than *Billy the Kid Versus Dracula*.

As Stoker's novel was cobbled together from bits of folklore he collected, it stands to reason that the character should continue to change and transform depending on the vision of a particular story.

"There are as many different versions of the Dracula story as there are adaptations," said author and *Dracula* expert David J. Skal. "They are not disrespecting Stoker's original vision, they are following the lead of folklore, which of course inspired Stoker from the very beginning. That's where Dracula's longevity comes from. He wouldn't live forever if he had been perfectly delineated." 💀

Vera West

By Jolene Richardson

(UNCREDITED)

Remembering the forgotten designer Of Golden-Age horror.

For the most part, the work of costume designers in horror goes unnoticed. My gut says this is because most of our field is made up of women. Costuming has a long history of being dismissed as "women's work," a stigma that lives on even today. Thanks to Mallory O'Meara, we know the story of Milicent Patrick and her work on *Creature from the Black Lagoon*, and how she was written out of history by the men making the decisions. So how did Vera West, who came decades before Patrick, fall through the cracks as a department head? As a costume designer myself, I have made it my mission to ensure that credit is given where it has been withheld and subsequently forgotten.

The Universal era of monsters and the iconography it produced has long since bled past horror fandom and has steeped its way into the vernacular of the everyday. The standard look that has been given to Frankenstein's Monster and the Bride, Dracula, the Mummy and countless others is thanks in part to Vera West and her team. West worked as the head of Universal's Costume Department from 1927 to early 1947, a position that would eventually be taken over by the renowned Edith Head. However, unlike Ms. Head, West's work would go almost entirely uncredited on-screen, only receiving some occasional "gowns by" mentions. West worked mostly in horror and mystery films for the studio, and after her time at Universal, she would total about 400 films, receiving no awards or accolades for her work. The best costume designer category of the Oscars would not come till 1949, after Edith Head demanded that their work be finally recognized and celebrated (two years after West's death).

West was responsible for designing all of the looks created for the lead women on screen, while the men were designed by Ed Ware (with West's final approval). Throughout my research, I've found it has been argued that the reason for West's work being largely kept in the shadows was that she had no "signature" when she designed. This certainly was not the case. She knew how to make the female form look beautiful and vulnerable, swathing her leading ladies over the arms of their monsters wearing silks and tulles.

West studied under the great couturier Lucile, Lady Duff Gordon, at the Philadelphia Institute of Design. When she finished school, West moved to New York City and began working in couture at a salon on Fifth Avenue. She left New

York somewhere between 1924–1925, leaving behind her job at the salon, but it is unclear why. There are multiple speculations as to what could have happened while she was in the city, but regardless of those theories, her coming to Hollywood to replace Lucia Coulter as head designer for Universal solidified her in the annals of horror history.

What West understood better than most was how to effectively use different textures and materials to costume her women within the story. Guided by the plot and tone, we would always see our leading ladies in well-tailored suits and day wear at the opening of each film. These Chanel and other high fashion pieces were used to distinguish different women and make them the focal point. They were well educated, came from money or held a higher standing in life. And yet they were the "All-American" women of the time, doe-eyed and small-framed, the perfect type for our male hero to save from the clutches of the beast.

Vulnerability was the cornerstone of West's work. She understood the symbolism of sleepwear and used this vulnerable act of sleeping to her advantage.

ZITA JOHANN'S GOSSAMER GET-UP IN *THE MUMMY*.

When the evil of the plot thickened or night fell, West would switch her women over to white draped sleepwear or evening gowns. When working in black and white, it's imperative that you strongly understand color theory in order to create the best definition for the camera. And while West's first act choices fit the characters beautifully, she was a master when working with her sleep and evening wear.

For Mae Clarke in the 1931 film *Frankenstein*, Elizabeth is wrapped in lace and silks to create this cocoon within her wedding dress. A garment inherently perceived to show the virginal innocence of the wearer, when we see Elizabeth seated in her room, Boris Karloff's monster lurking through the window, she looks ethereal and untouchable; almost as if these layers can protect her from the evil that is coming up behind her. For a 1930s audience, in which women did not have the agency that the modern woman is given, she becomes even more of a figure to protect.

Vulnerability was the cornerstone of West's work. She understood the symbolism of sleepwear and used this vulnerable act of sleeping to her advantage. When night took hold, these leading ladies shed their daywear and opted for white silks and chiffons to drape over their bodies. Though of the day, these pieces were considered quite revealing as they showed off every curve of the female form. To a modern audience, however, these nightgowns are far too elegant to wear to bed but are still covetable pieces one can dream to own.

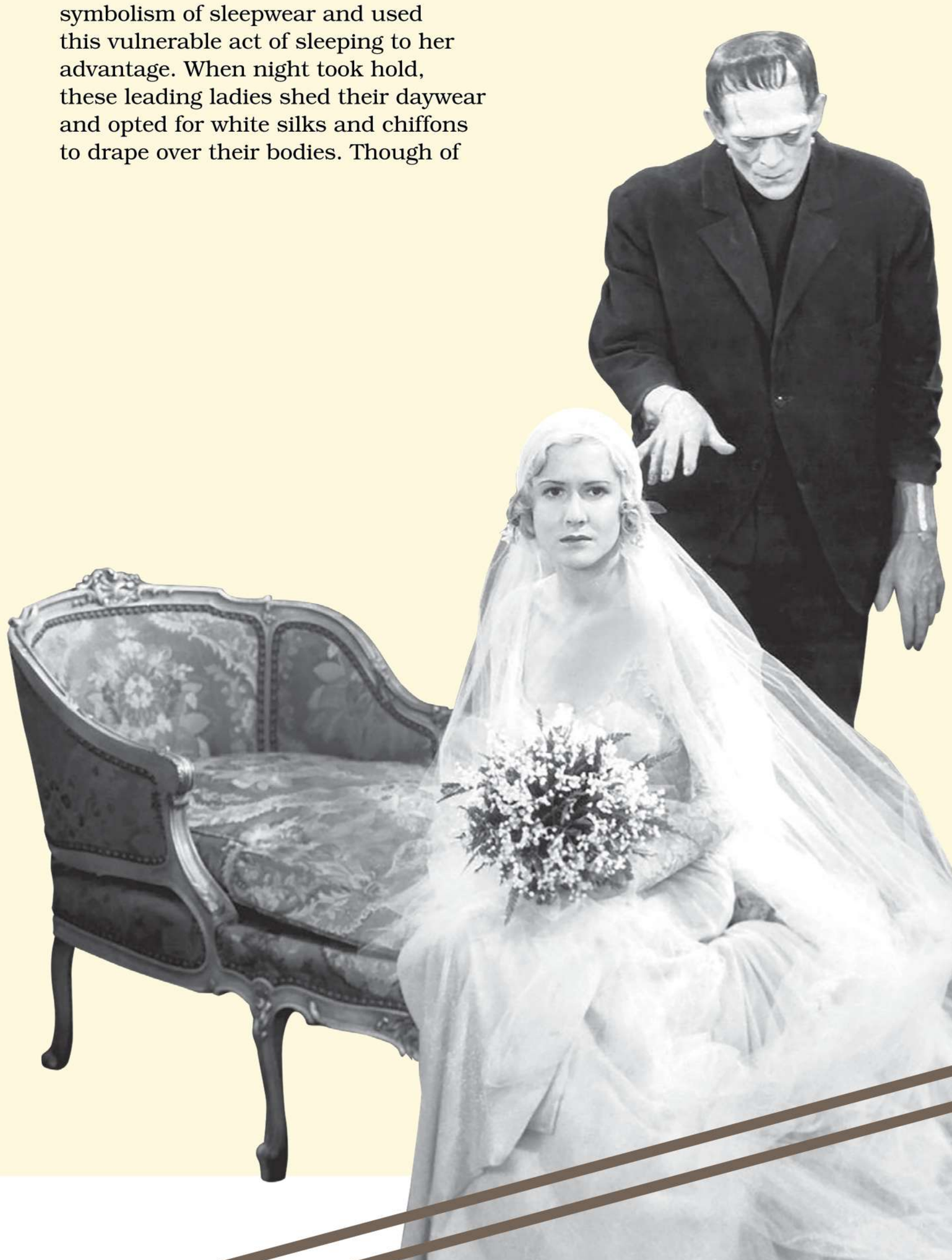
Her first few films were pre-Hays Code, and we can see just how much that influenced the dress of the leading woman. Take Zita Johann in 1932's *The Mummy*, and her final dress when the mortal form of Helen is fully possessed by Anck-su-namun. She is seen wearing a wrap top and full-length skirt that is draped in jewels. It hugs her small frame perfectly and acts as both a tantalizing image of an Egyptian princess and an innocent victim of Imhotep's deep obsession with his late lover. Her skin was covered just enough, yet the weight of the fabric feels like she could slip through your grasp if the wind blows. Lady Duff Gordon was a pioneer in the realm of lingerie and nightwear for women, and you can see the lasting influence she bestowed upon West.

While some of her post-Hays Code films did not quite reach the revealing levels from *The Mummy*, she still found ways to push the envelope. The looks were sexy, alluring, and yet still remained innocent. That was the key to these earlier films; these women had to remain "savable." If they became too sexual, they would not be worth a "decent" man's pursuit to save them.

There is a timelessness to the garments that bestows the wearer with that otherworldly quality I alluded to earlier. Of course, we know that these films are almost 100 years old. Yet when we see these women, they look as if they could be going out to a chic restaurant tonight on the Upper West Side.

The most famous of the Universal-era gowns is, of course, the one worn by Elsa Lanchester as the Bride in Bride of Frankenstein. Lanchester was in no more than five minutes of the film with no dialogue and three screams, yet she is the most famous female monster we have to date. She is instantly recognizable, with her long white caped dress, wrapped arms, tall-standing hair with that defining white streak, and the deep red upon her lips. We see her throughout costume stores every Halloween season, and on merchandise coveted by fans of classic horror. The Bride has become just as famous as her man-made hubby, and easily as recognizable as a mouse in red trousers.

One of my favorite books on the subject is *Fashioning Horror* by Julia Petrov and Gudrun D. Whitehead. Those who know me know how much I reference this book because it is just that good, and is the only one of its kind. However, it makes no mention of the work that Vera West did in creating the Bride's distinctive gown. In fact, not much information can be found on this dress. I have read that it was constructed from hospital sheets and medical bandages. While detailed images sure make it look like it was, who's to say for sure? The Bride's image becomes the creation of what Barbra Creed cites as being the "monstrous-feminine." Unlike her male counterparts, where they only seek death and destruction (a pattern of behavior Dr. Frankenstein's creature fell into incidentally), she has the chance to both create life and destroy it, which gives the doctor pause when creating her.



MAE CLARKE'S ELIZABETH IS A VULNERABLE TARGET FOR THE MONSTER (BORIS KARLOFF) IN *FRANKENSTEIN*.

West uses white again to show the innocence and virginal quality of a creature who has just been brought into this world. The gown drapes Lanchester's body, fully hiding the female figure beneath. However, we are given a fully developed woman who is created solely for the companionship of the original creation. While he is allowed to be hideous, she must remain pristine and visibly unscarred. It isn't until *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* in 1994 with costumes designed by James Acheson where the idea of monstrous female beauty standards surrounding the Bride are challenged.

After she left Universal, West went on to open up a boutique at the Beverly Wilshire Hotel, but would never get to see her independent work flourish. She was found dead in the pool of her Hollywood Hills home in June of 1947. Two notes left at the scene suggested suicide, but a definitive answer was never found.

Lanchester was in no more than five minutes of the film with no dialogue and three screams, yet she is the most famous female monster we have to date.

The mystery surrounding her life — and her death — persists to this day. But the lasting impression West made in the horror genre should be talked about far more than it is. She not only paved the way for some of the most famous costume designers in filmmaking, but her work and her characters live on, creating new life from their own iconography (I'm looking at you Halloween Horror Nights 2021, dedicating an entire house to the Bride).

The work of Vera West — and of all costume designers — deserves recognition and in-depth analysis so that others will know that there are more people behind the camera than just directors and actors, and that what we do is more than just shopping and sewing. No matter the garment, whether period, contemporary or futuristic, creative decisions were thoughtfully and deliberately made by talented artists to create the iconic characters who go on to become part of the fabric of popular culture. 💀

INSTANT ICON: ELSA LANCHESTER IN *BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN.*

BY BRETT GALLMAN

TYBURN FILMS

By the early '70s, Hammer Films and Amicus Productions were firmly established as the twin cornerstones of British horror, with relative upstart Tigon making its case for adding a third column. Hammer's success was especially remarkable, spanning two decades as the studio stayed abreast of evolving tastes while also satisfying a nostalgic craving for the classic monsters that catapulted it to its greatest success. British horror was booming, so it's no wonder that Kevin Francis—son of legendary cinematographer/director Freddie Francis—felt emboldened to leave his mark on the family business by founding Tyburn Films Limited, an independent company that looked to become the next big thing.

However, Francis's grandiose vision of the future was moored in the past. In his quest to become the next Hammer, he leaned heavily on that studio's formula for success, crafting films with familiar gothic aesthetics and employing talent that had established itself in the halls of Bray Studios, including his father Freddie. The template for such a familial business evoked Hammer's history, which saw founders James Carreras and William Hinds hand over the reins to their sons, Michael and Anthony, who launched the studio's golden era. What was old would be new again, and you could hardly blame the younger Francis for believing this mantra could last forever considering how long Hammer repackaged and sold nostalgic staples. Little did he—or Hammer itself—notice the cracks forming in the façades of the old guard, which would be defunct within a decade once Amicus, Hammer, and Tigon shut down. That's the problem with nostalgia: at some point, one generation's fond memories become relics to the next generation.

But this wasn't on Francis's mind when he set out to make *Persecution*, Tyburn's first production. Cut from the same cloth as Hammer's line of twisted psychological thrillers, it finds vet Don Chaffey attempting to recapture the success the studio had with its Grande Dame Guignol pictures starring Bette Davis. In this one, Lana Turner is Carrie Masters, a bitter, crippled woman

who loves two things: her cat, Sheba, and toying with anyone who ever slighted her. Even her son is fair game: now a grown man with a wife and an infant son, David (Ralph Bates) begrudgingly returns home, on edge yet still unprepared for the extremes to which his domineering mother will go. Hell hath no fury like a mother scorned by her own child—and, as it turns out, multiple former lovers.

Even though it seems familiar, *Persecution* is a startlingly demented Oedipal thriller. It opens with a young David drowning Sheba in her milk, and Carrie responds in kind by wrapping up the corpse as a Christmas present before forcing the poor kid to bury his misdeed. Remarkably, tensions continue to escalate from this point: let's just say a movie willing to off a pet in its opening scene has few sacred cows. Turner is unhinged as Carrie orchestrates the destruction of her son's life, enlisting Sheba and a sultry nurse (Olga Georges-Picot) in a fiendish plot that's worthy of a Korean revenge thriller. Flashbacks through more traumatic Christmases, disastrous dinner parties, and tense staircase confrontations illuminate a sordid past to account for the horrific present, where Carrie is a twisted husk driven by vengeance.

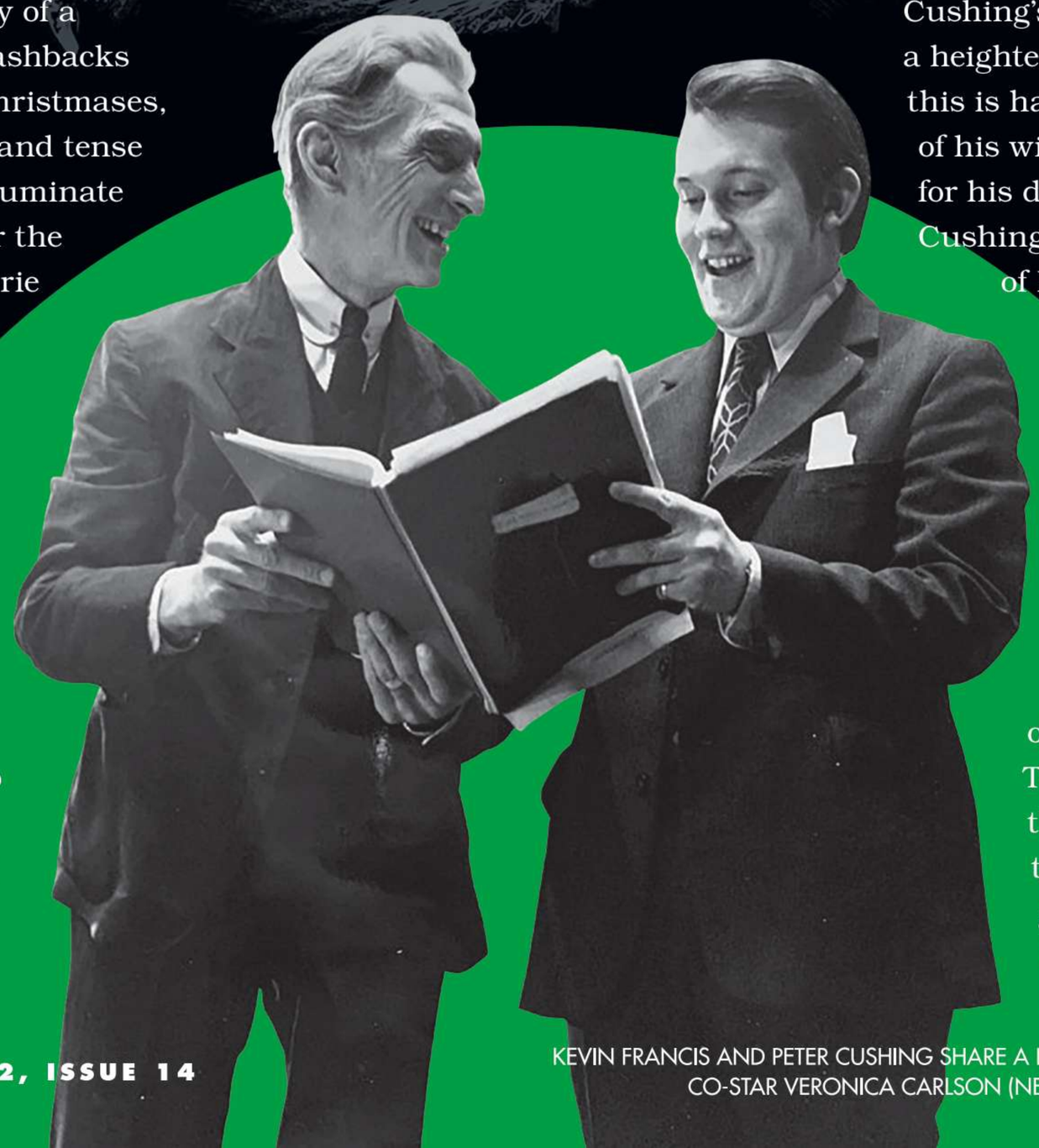
This vindictive matriarch is reminiscent of Davis's character in *The Anniversary*, and screenwriter Robert Hutton wrote the role with her in mind. Other Hammer echoes linger in the presence of Sheba, who slinks and purrs about much like the titular feline in 1961's *Shadow of the Cat*, one of those psycho-thrillers that feels like a blueprint for *Persecution*. But where Hammer filmed so many of those chillers in black and white, *Persecution* flourishes in color, marrying the lush production design of Hammer's signature gothic productions with the perverse shocks of its thrillers. It's the most successful Tyburn horror production because its warped screenplay attempts to provoke and shock audiences in a manner that was becoming common in an era when old monsters and ghouls weren't cutting it anymore.

But this wasn't true of Tyburn's second effort, a blatant attempt at retracing Hammer's steps with *The Ghoul*, which saw Francis getting the band back together, tapping his father to direct Peter Cushing in a script written by Anthony Hinds. And not just any script: *The Ghoul* is a reworking of Hind's *The Reptile*, as he borrows that film's skeletal plot—a reverend (Cushing) hides an accursed, bloodthirsty child (Don Henderson) after an encounter with mystical Asian forces—and transplants it to a remote countryside. In this take, the widower Reverend Lawrence, his son, an Indian servant (Gwen Watford), and a gardener (John Hurt) are holed up in an old mansion surrounded by desolate, fog-shrouded marshlands. It's exactly the kind of place that unsuspecting travelers often stumble upon in Hammer movies, and *The Ghoul* follows suit by stranding Billy (Stewart Bevan) and Daphne (Veronica Carlson) near the house's foreboding grounds. Despite so many warning signs (Hurt's leering gardener is a walking red flag), they enjoy Lawrence's hospitality, oblivious that they're about to become the latest sacrifice for his son.

What was old would be new again, and you could hardly blame the younger Francis for believing this mantra could last forever considering how long Hammer repackaged and sold nostalgic staples.

When it was released in 1966, *The Reptile* already felt formulaic, arriving just as Anthony Nelson Keys transformed Hammer into a movie factory, quickly churning out movies shot back-to-back by recycling costumes and sets. Whatever idiosyncratic charms its bait-and-switch approach had in '66 (it has all the markings of a vampire movie, only its creature is a grotesque snake-person) were gone a decade later in this creakier redux that revises minor details and soaks them in the nasty, gnarly gore that Hammer hadn't indulged yet. Some of these details are an improvement: Cushing's tragic performance lends a heightened gravity, though even this is haunted by the recent passing of his wife, Helen. Lawrence's laments for his dead wife (delivered as Cushing cradles an actual picture of Helen) have a raw, exploitative quality that makes *The Ghoul* unexpectedly uncomfortable and squeamish.

Hurt's impish presence is also a welcome upgrade, and the script has him stirring up even more trouble than the titular ghoul, who remains off-screen until the climax. To its credit, this is one of the few horror films to exploit the ghoul mythos. While ghouls have become a vague catch-all to describe monsters, the legend has



KEVIN FRANCIS AND PETER CUSHING SHARE A LIGHT MOMENT ON THE SET OF *THE GHOUL*. CO-STAR VERONICA CARLSON (NEXT PAGE) WAS APPARENTLY NOT INCLUDED.

its roots in the Arabic folklore that provides the backstory here. These distinctions do what they can to shake off the déjà vu that lingers over the film like a fog, and the film's repetitive structure, which finds two sets of travelers falling prey to the same routine, doesn't help. You can forgive contemporary audiences for finding it tedious, especially those familiar with Hammer's earlier effort.

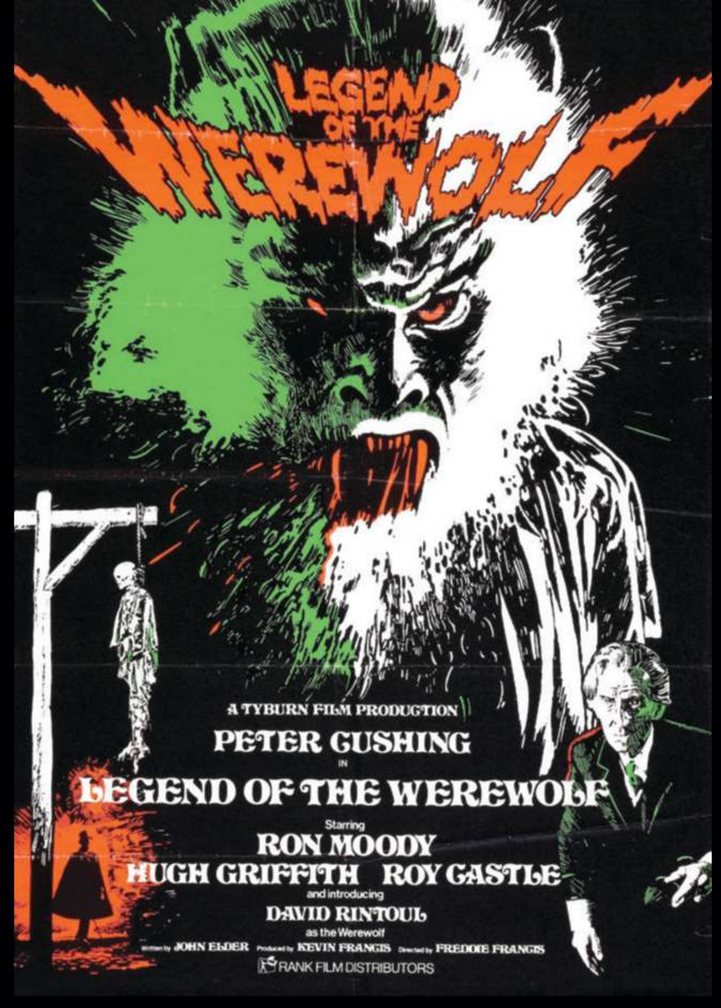
Freddie Francis would return to direct Cushing for the eighth and final time for *Legend of the Werewolf*, Tyburn's '70s swan song. It, too, shares the skeletal arc of a previous Hammer production, in this case 1961's *Curse of the Werewolf*, another Hinds script that took inspiration from Guy Endore's *The Werewolf of Paris*. However, the similarities begin and end with a child born on Christmas Eve, an accursed date of birth in Eastern European and Russian folklore. *Legend* is quicker to the point, too: it drops the lengthy backstory of its predecessor, opening instead with the birth of the accursed child Etoile (David Rintoul), a foundling raised by wolves who becomes a traveling circus's star attraction until he transforms into a wolf and kills a fellow performer. He flees to Paris, where he falls in love with a girl (Lynn Dalby) whose exploits at the local brothel conspire with the full moon to trigger Etoile's bloodlust.

Legend of the Werewolf comes to life when Cushing enters the picture as Paul, a medical advisor who assists the police's investigation. He's delightful here, channeling the cool sense of authority that made him so magnetic as Sherlock Holmes and Van Helsing. Introduced as he eagerly dives into a grisly cadaver, Cushing is a wry yet dignified presence, slyly slinking around his superiors to pursue his own investigation when he suspects a werewolf is afoot. Cushing's Tyburn work is a testament to his incredible range as a performer, revealing that he was equally capable of portraying a tragic, misguided priest or an eccentric, dogged coroner. Considering the tragic circumstances surrounding *The Ghoul*, it's a relief to see him having more fun here.

Appearances by British horror vets Hugh Griffith and Michael Ripper further entrench *Legend of the Werewolf*'s classical roots, and any attempts to appease the shifting tides of taste are mostly cosmetic. Again, the film heaps on more gore and schlock to appeal to a younger crowd that may have seen it akin to an old man trying on a garish, ill-fitting suit since these modern shocks remain in service of an old-fashioned narrative about a tortured werewolf and his doomed romance. Even if Rintoul admirably steps into Oliver Reed's shoes, he never escapes his shadow, and inevitable comparisons are rarely favorable for the guy retracing the steps. The same holds true for *Legend of the Werewolf* in general: It's arguably better than its predecessor, boasting sharper pacing, impressive stylistic flourishes, and Cushing's memorable turn.

And yet, it's doomed to be the also-ran, the movie that came nearly 15 years later and played to a less interested audience. Going into the gothic horror business at this point would have been like investing in the horse-and-buggy just as the Model T started rolling off of the assembly line. Simply put, its time was over, and the simultaneous collapse of the British film industry meant Tyburn wasn't long for this world. An announced adaptation of Dennis Wheatley's *The Satanist* never came to fruition, and Tyburn didn't resurface until Francis produced World Cup documentary *G'olé!* and *Sherlock Holmes and the Masks of Death* for television in the '80s. The latter saw Cushing reprise the title role for the first time since the 1960s, with Hinds and British horror vet Roy Ward Baker in tow again, revealing that Kevin Francis was determined to indulge his nostalgic whims. It's hardly surprising that the final Tyburn production to date was the Freddie Francis lensed *Peter Cushing: A One-Way Ticket to Hollywood*, a documentary tribute to the actor who defined an era of British horror.

But here's the other thing about nostalgia: let it linger long enough and weave through multiple generations, and it's bound to appeal to someone. What were dusty relics upon release have become curiosities, especially since the Tyburn productions have remained so obscure. While



they appeared on television and VHS, they've fallen into a void for the past couple of decades, never officially surfacing on DVD or Blu-ray. In an era where home video labels routinely turn up underseen obscurities, it's remarkable that films with this lineage continue to languish without a release. At the very least, these movies deserve a chance to flourish and break free from the murky, low-res VHS rips floating around the web.

Such a fate is a reminder that there's no sure thing when it comes to film preservation and home video—here are a set of movies that have been lost to time despite hailing from a formative era in horror history, involving many of its key players to boot. It's tempting to wonder if it's proof that Tyburn was doomed to fail, its ill fate woven into the fabric of a tattered British horror scene. Hopefully, though, the Tyburn story isn't defined by failure but by redemption if a label finally strikes a deal, rescuing the films from obscurity and granting them their rightful place on collectors' shelves, right alongside their long-lauded contemporaries. Francis might not have established the "next Hammer," but he did establish the one and only Tyburn, a small but crucial piece of the British horror puzzle. 💀

BY RODNEY ASCHER

DEMONS AND LOVERS

The year is 1976 and in the city of Jackson, Michigan (oft-disputed birthplace of both the Coney Island Hot Dog and the Republican Party) a series of cascading crises are hitting critical mass as a small group of friends are pitted against one another in a potentially lethal confrontation. No one who survives this terrible night will ever be the same.

The strange thing about that story is that it applies equally well to the 1977 horror movie *The Demon Lover* as it does to 1980's *Demon Lover Diary*, the verité documentary that captures all the tedium, drama and chaos that erupted on set during *The Demon Lover*'s rocky production.

Maybe it's not a coincidence; making-of films often have an eerie way of echoing the plots of the projects they're documenting. Three quick examples:

- *Hearts of Darkness*, and the movie whose creation it documents, *Apocalypse Now* each tell the story of a once-promising leader who loses his mind while creating an isolated militaristic compound.

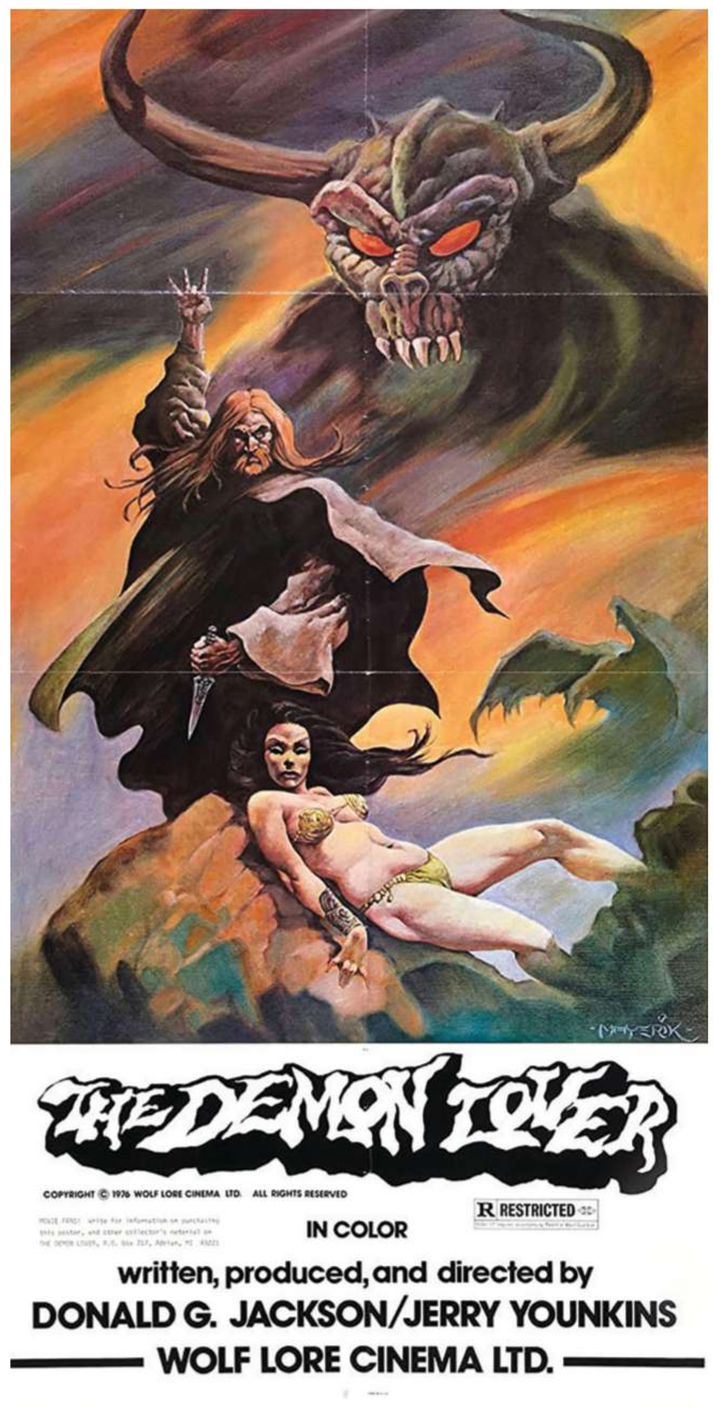
- *Burden of Dreams* tells a similar story as *Fitzcaraldo*, both of them concerning European madmen whose sheer force of will managed to compel hundreds of Peruvian laborers to carry a 320 ton steamship over a mountain on their backs.

- In *Lost Soul*, Richard Stanley is fired as director of 1996's *The Island of Dr Moreau* (and replaced by John Frankenheimer) only to secretly infiltrate the set and find himself turned into a beast-man, damned to wander a tropical hellscape among a horde of no-longer-human companions.

Still, *Demon Lover Diary* is a singular experience. It's not even very much like *American Movie*, its sunnier doppelgänger. That newer doc made gentle fun of, but ultimately admired, the pair of aspiring horror filmmakers it focused on. The crews of *The Demon Lover* and *Demon Lover Diary*, on the other hand, palpably loathed each other. Strangely enough, they created dueling films with more in common than you'd expect.

BACKSTORY: Director/ Cinematographer/ Narrator/ Editor Joel DeMott and her boyfriend Jeff Kreines were living in Cambridge, Massachusetts studying film at MIT. They had a special interest in a rigorous branch of documentary filmmaking called direct cinema. Long story short, this was a pared down, fly-on-the-wall approach to non-fiction film, swearing off all sorts of artificial manipulations, dedicated to capturing an ever elusive TRUTH. The films from this movement (including D. A. Pennebaker's *Don't Look Back* and Frederick Wiseman's *Titicut Follies*) were made possible by small, lightweight, synch-sound cameras that allowed filmmakers to observe life as it happens. Interestingly, the same technology did a lot to liberate horror films from the stiff and creaky stage-bound creations of yore to productions as raw, visceral, and, yes, "real" as T*he Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, made just two years earlier by former documentary cameraman Tobe Hooper.

Hooper's movie was almost certainly an inspiration to Jeff Kreines' friend in Michigan, Don Jackson and *his* friend Jerry Younkins. Don and Jerry wrote *The Demon Lover* together while working at a speedometer cable factory and took time off to shoot it, reaching out to Jeff for help. They struck a bargain: Jeff would do the camerawork for Don and Jerry's film for free and in exchange, Joel would have complete freedom to shoot a documentary chronicling *The Demon Lover*'s production.


THE DEMON LOVER
COPYRIGHT © 1976 WOLF LORE CINEMA LTD. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED
R RESTRICTED
IN COLOR
written, produced, and directed by
DONALD G. JACKSON/JERRY YOUNKINS
WOLF LORE CINEMA LTD.

This was a pared down, fly-on-the-wall approach to non-fiction film, dedicated to capturing an ever elusive TRUTH.

(TOP) RELEASE ART FOR *THE DEMON LOVER*.

(BOTTOM) *THE TEXAS CHAIN SAW MASSACRE* UNLEASHED — FOR BETTER OR WORSE — A NEW WAVE OF VERITÉ GENRE FILMS.

CUT TO: Both films' productions are jeopardized just about as soon as the two teams meet. Once the documentary crew arrives in Michigan, Don, short on help, demands that Joel stay and work in the office. She scoffs at the idea and Jeff threatens to quit. The argument goes on and on and on; "I'm not gonna stay and be the girl who answers phones" she tells them, and keeps right on rolling as Jerry gives her camera the finger. You might think things could only get better from here, but you'd be wrong.

In quick succession, Jeff's gear is ruined by a whipped cream-heavy improv, precious shoot days are blown off in lieu of interviews with local press, and real, loaded weapons are used as props (albeit under the watchful eyes of Ted Nugent).

When I watched *Demon Lover Diary* for the first time, (a pristine film projection at a festival almost 20 years ago) it was clear to me that Joel was a true auteur and a sly anthropologist. There's something to that, and focusing on the ineptitude, arrogance and strange regional quirks (from the perspective of East Coast academics, anyway) exhibited in Jackson is a perfectly valid way to watch the movie. I was surprised, though, that my recent rewatch (of a hideously degraded, but still completely absorbing Nth generation bootleg) left me with a fair amount of empathy for Don and Jerry, too. Not only did they risk everything they had putting together their blood- and satanism-soaked labor of love, but Jerry threw in money from a recent (likely deliberate) injury at the factory, too: during the standoff at the top of the film he shouts "I lost my fucking fingers to do this movie!"

Demon Lover Diary is one of the most visceral documents of life on the set I've ever seen. Beautifully filmed and carefully observed, it's a testament to how much one person with a camera can accomplish (and not with an iPhone 13 in cinematic mode, either; she did it in 1976, changing 400' magazines of 16mm film every time she exposed 12 minutes of footage.)

The film's minimalist approach is unrelenting; without music, talking heads, or even lower thirds, we are immersed in this slow-moving trainwreck along with the cast and crew. When Joel and soundman Mark Rance collapse into a giddy, manic, sleep-deprived laughing fit I suffered flashbacks to my own former life as a P.A on TV commercials where I survived countless 20-plus hour days that only ended when a producer would pull the plug in order to avoid paying the crew triple-time. Some behind-the-scenes docs capture the camaraderie and adventure of life on a film set, as do some of my favorite scripted movies-about-making-movies (like *Tristram Shandy*, *Irma Vep* or *The Stuntman*) but few of them drag us into the sucking quicksand of being trapped on a dispiriting and endless shoot, working for nothing on a project you hate.

The best documentaries bleed into other genres and this one frequently works as a comedy (well... cringe comedy, anyway) with deadpan readings of lines worthy of Armando Iannucci; "When he says it's junk," Don tells a local reporter, correcting Jerry's way-too-candid remark, "he means it's pure entertainment." There's even a passage that plays as a gentle romantic comedy as Mark falls for one of the local actresses while Joel delightedly eggs him on, not so much a fly on the wall, as wingman.

Most fitting here, of course, are the passages where it becomes a real-life horror movie, foreshadowing frantic moments from *Cannibal Holocaust* or *The Blair Witch Project* as, in its final act, Jeff and Joel, camera still rolling, literally run for their lives with gunshots echoing behind them. As they frantically pack their shit and race to their car, Don's mother's offscreen voice rings out behind them "I'M PROUD THE MOVIE'S BROKE! I'M PROUD THE MOVIE'S OVER WITH! I HATE THAT MOVIE! NOW THERE'LL BE NO MORE MOVIE, WILL THERE?"

Surprisingly enough, there was. I have no idea if they had enough in the can to finish *The Demon Lover* at the point where the documentary abruptly ended or if Don and Jerry found a replacement for Jeff and kept on going, but the movie was fully shot, cut, and released in 1977. I recently tracked down a copy of *The Demon Lover* (here retitled *Demon Master*) and

Few behind-the-scenes-documentaries drag us into the sucking quicksand of being trapped on a dispiriting and endless shoot, working for nothing on a project you hate.

DEMON LOVER DIARY FILMMAKER JOEL DEMOTT.

it and the doc make an unbelievable double feature. (If you try it at home, I'd suggest you screen *Diary* first.)

I was thrilled to discover that just as *Demon Lover Diary* sometimes plays as a horror film, the reverse was also true. Thom Andersen, in his must-see essay film *Los Angeles Plays Itself*, talks about 'accidental documentaries' and makes a lot of startling discoveries about LA's real-life history hidden in background details of forgotten noirs. Low-budget films tend to shoot in real locations, and here, within *Demon Master*, lies a rich visual history of 1970s Southern Michigan. The film is filled with the authentic period haircuts and cars, furniture and neon that would take a team with as much money and talent as the crew of *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* to put on the screen today. In *Demon Lover*, as Detective Frazetta* meanders his way through his investigation of the strange occult murders bedeviling Jackson, Michigan (at one point interviewing a scholar of the dark arts played by Gunnar Hansen), we're treated to lingering shots of 49202's finest dive bars, dojos and doughnut shops.

The Demon Lover, on its own terms, is a sloppily charming story of a half-dozen aimless 20-something dirtbags who look to the knife-throwing karate champ and aspiring cult leader Laval Blessing (played by co-director Jerry Younkins under the alias "Christmas Robbins") for some new kicks via black magick rituals. Soon enough, victims are being dragged into the woods and dead boyfriends are briefly resurrected to throttle their former lovers from the backseat of their cars.

Don and Jerry's movie takes its time setting up all its dominoes, but the final act does manage to build up some genuine momentum, and the film goes out on an effectively jarring note. The surprising success of its final act is aided by a very effective, if primitive, proto-electronic score.

It's fascinating, after looking over Jeff's shoulder throughout *Diary*, to see the work he did here on Don and Jerry's behalf and to imagine him

(THIS PAGE AND FOLLOWING) SCENES FROM *THE DEMON LOVER*.

*Many of the characters are named after geek culture luminaries, from Sam Pekinpah to Bernie Wrightson. Bolstering the film's cred in this capacity, is the fact that Val Mayerik, co-creator of the original *Howard the Duck* comic not only did the Frazetta-esque poster, but is also in the cast.

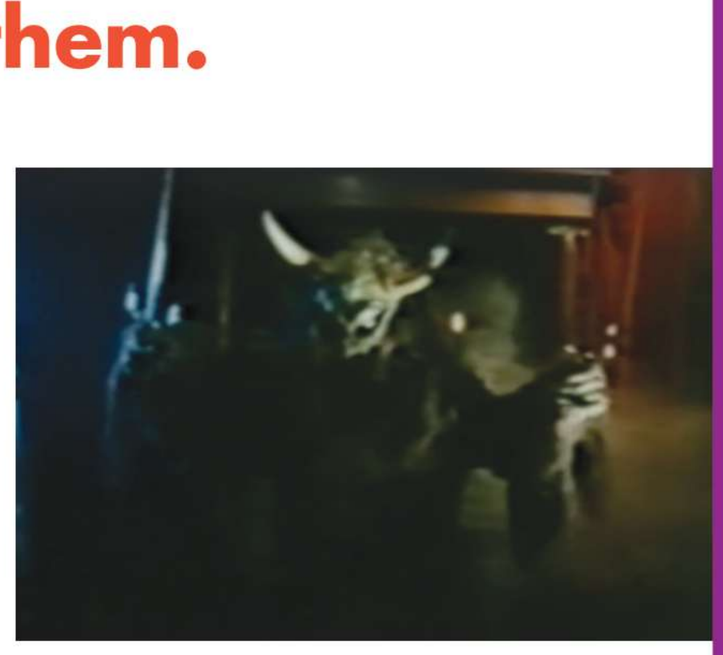
watching the mayhem unfold through the viewfinder. One of the surprising things about *Diary* is we see so little of the film Don and Jerry are making, and not even a glimpse of the monster that Jerry says is "the real star of the movie." That makes the titular demon's reveal (straight from a '70s metal album cover or airbrushed custom van) all the more rewarding when one finally watches *Demon Lover*. For me, it was a wait of almost 20 years.

The relationship between documentary and horror, halfway coincidental here, is one that others have pushed further by design. From *In Search Of...* to *Cropsey*, docs have used horror-inspired musical scores and atmospheric filmed reenactments to great effect, and the whole contemporary cycle of found footage horror from 1998's *The Last Broadcast* to last year's *Host* incorporate non-fiction film techniques to make their nightmare scenarios all the more believable.

Both films are tricky to find these days; *The Demon Lover* is available only as an out-of-print VHS or DVD with copies going for hundreds of dollars on the collectors market and *Demon Lover Diary* has never been released on home video in any format. It still periodically screens on film at festivals and revivals, at least as recently as part of the 2017 series "Woman With a Movie Camera" at the BFI.

AFTERMATH: Joel DeMott and Jeff Kreines would continue collaborating, going on to co-direct the widely acclaimed documentary *Seventeen* that took the top Jury prize at Sundance but whose raw, uncensored look at teenage life led to a long and painful conflict with PBS and the Xerox corporation, the film's sponsor.

It becomes a real-life horror movie as Jeff and Joel, camera still rolling, literally run for their lives with gunshots echoing behind them.



Don and Jerry would go their separate ways. Don moved to Hollywood where he plunged ever deeper into exploitation cinema (directing over 40 films, including *Hell Comes to Frogtown* and *Lingerie Kickboxer*) before dying in 2003. Jerry Younkins, seen wielding some formidable blades in the movie, is the author of two well-regarded books on knives. 💀

Monster Ink

The Terrifying Tattoos of Paul Acker

BY DAN FRAGA

Paul Acker is regarded as one of the world's top tattoo artists specializing in the style known as horror realism. His stunning designs often combine beautiful color work with grotesque imagery, resulting in ultra-realistic tattoo portraits of creatures, killers, and a rogues' gallery of cult cinema's most infamous figures. What sets Acker's work apart from that of his peers is a passion and reverence for horror cinema which, when combined with his artistic talent, seems to bring his subjects to life — even the dead ones.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF PAUL ACKER

Acker can trace his love of horror back to a pivotal childhood experience in the mid-1980s: "I vividly recall walking into the living room while my dad was watching the first *Nightmare on Elm Street*. It was the scene when Freddy's arms stretch out across the alley, and as a kid, I remember thinking, 'What the hell is that?!?' I had never seen anything like it."

It wasn't long before the budding horror buff discovered *Friday the 13th*, *Halloween*, and other genre classics, often recording his favorites off of basic cable television. He was determined to recreate the gory effects portrayed on screen, and while other kids his age were riding bikes or playing sports, Acker spent his free time — and his allowance money — crafting gruesome gashes out of liquid latex and fake blood. Word of Acker's ghoulish hobby got around the neighborhood, but it only ever brought him clout once October rolled around. "I was never really that popular," he admits, "except at Halloween."

As Acker was discovering his love of horror, he was also developing his skills as an artist. From early childhood, it was evident that he possessed a strong talent for drawing, and family members and teachers encouraged him to consider art as a potential career. Acker attended the Philadelphia High School for Creative and Performing Arts, though his artistic style was inspired more by Giger and Gogos than Monet or Van Gogh. "A lot of the teachers weren't supportive of the art I wanted to do," he said, adding "I always found a way to steer my projects toward horror and punk rock."

"A lot of the teachers weren't supportive of the art I wanted to do, I always found a way to steer my projects toward horror and punk rock."

It was also during his teenage years that Acker started getting tattooed, attributing his early fascination with the craft to a "cool heavy metal uncle" who had tattoos of the Xenomorph from *Alien* and British metal band Iron Maiden's monstrous mascot, Eddie. "I had seen tattoos on people in the movies, but they were never things that I recognized. As a kid, seeing [my uncle's] tattoos made me realize this is an art form, and it is rebellious!"

Acker began tattooing at age eighteen, though he did not go the traditional apprenticeship route which often involves months of menial labor before actually getting to wield a tattoo gun. He was getting tattooed regularly at a small shop in Northeast Philly, and one day decided to show the owner some of his artwork and original tattoo designs. The shop owner was sufficiently impressed with Acker's talent and offered him a job on the spot. "I was just thrown to the wolves," Acker laughs, but he was determined to devote the time and energy needed to perfect his craft.

"The first tattoo I ever did was actually a Misfits skull," Acker says, referring to the iconic "Crimson Ghost" logo of the legendary horror punk band, The Misfits. "I was pretty conscious that I wanted my first tattoo to be something that would stand the test of time and would be important to me. It was on my best friend, and we were both huge Misfits fans, so it needed to be something we would both be into forever."

While his days in the shop were mostly spent inking traditional hearts and crosses on walk-in clients, Acker refined his skills by tattooing horror portraits on his friends during the off hours. Though most horror-themed tattoos at the time were done using black and grey ink, Acker utilized vibrant colors in his portraiture. "I

PHOTOS COURTESY OF PAUL ACKER

was really influenced by [*Famous Monsters* magazine cover artist] Basil Gogos and wanted to bring his style into tattooing. I thought that if I could achieve what was being done in black and grey, but in color, then maybe that could really give me an advantage in the tattoo world."

Sure enough, the tattoo world soon took notice of Acker's unique style. He became a regular showstopper at tattoo conventions across the country, and his arsenal of assorted zombies, vampires, and creeps often took the top prizes in daily competitions. Featured articles in popular tattoo magazines like *Inked* also helped share Acker's diabolical design work with a wider audience. Within just a few years of starting his career, Acker became one of the most sought-after artists in the nation, particularly for horror fans hoping to get permanent portraits of their favorite monsters and madmen.

Acker concedes that many of his clients come to him with somewhat traditional requests. "I've tattooed tons of the classic '70s and '80s horror characters," he said. "Freddy, Jason, Pinhead, Leatherface, all of that stuff. But honestly, I am still not tired of doing those characters, as long as I can find a different way to approach the design and not replicate exactly what I have done before."

While Acker's portfolio contains its share of horror's heavy hitters, genre fans can spot some deeper cuts as well: the murderous matriarch from Charles Kaufman's *Mother's Day*; the psychotic psychiatrist Decker from Clive Barker's *Nightbreed*; or Florence Pugh's May Queen from *Midsommar*.

Acker's clear talent and prowess in the realm of terrifying tattoo design has attracted the attention of some of the artist's horror heroes, who have turned to him for their own ink. He has twice tattooed the king of splatter himself, special effects icon Tom Savini. The two met through mutual friends at a convention, and have since gone on to become friends themselves. "I'm on the Christmas card list," Acker notes with a chuckle.

Equally karmic is the fiendship that Acker has formed with another one of his idols; Misfits guitarist Doyle Wolfgang von Frankenstein, who booked an appointment with the artist after discovering his work via social media. Despite the musician's monstrous appearance and imposing physique, Acker shares that Doyle is "the nicest guy on earth," and while he may not be the Christmas card type, Doyle did provide Acker with backstage passes to the Misfits' 2016 reunion concerts as a token of his appreciation.

While he has rubbed elbows with horror royalty, Acker says his greatest satisfaction comes from connecting with other fans who share his enthusiasm for the genre. To that end, Acker has created a shop where horror buffs will most certainly feel at home.

The Seance Tattoo Parlor is a suitably wicked workspace just outside of Philadelphia, PA, that is also a miniature museum of the macabre. Acker opened his custom tattoo studio in 2015, and its elegant gothic aesthetic serves as the perfect backdrop for the morbid designs of its resident artists. Clients waiting for their turn in the chair can pore over the horror movie collectibles and memorabilia on display throughout the studio. They'll find autographed photos of genre faves like Angus Scrimm and Tobe Hooper, as well as special effects props from movies like *Bram Stoker's Dracula* and the 2013 remake of *Evil Dead*. There's even a screening room in the shop where the artists and their friends can take in a monster movie or two while winding down after work. The studio's popularity has prompted Acker to create The Seance Brand, a line of horror-themed apparel and accessories designed by the artist and collaborators such as comic book creator/Seance Tattoo compatriot Buz Hasson. Acker sees the venture into frightening fashion as a new medium for expressing his creativity and his commitment to the genre.

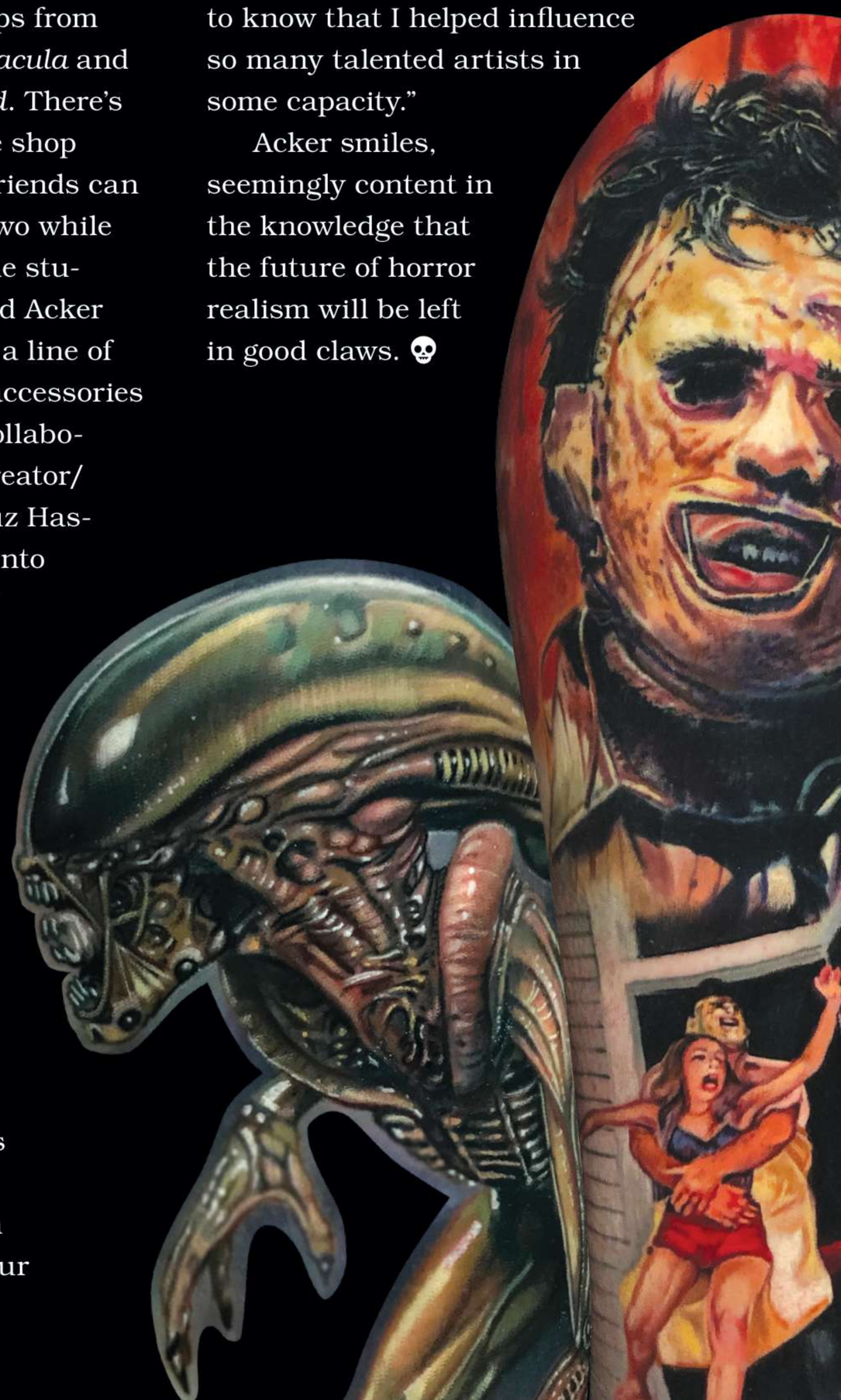
While Acker has no immediate plans to slow down — he is considering opening a second Seance shop on the West Coast and dividing his time between the two — the artist does recognize that there will come a point when he'll need to holster his tattoo gun. "One thing I've learned after twenty years in this job is that your body, your

back, your hands, don't hold up as well as you'd like them to," he concedes.

Asked to consider what he would like his final tattoo portrait to be, Acker is quiet and contemplative. "That's a tough one," he says. "Maybe to bring my career full circle, I would make it a Misfits skull. Maybe I'll do it on Doyle!" he laughs.

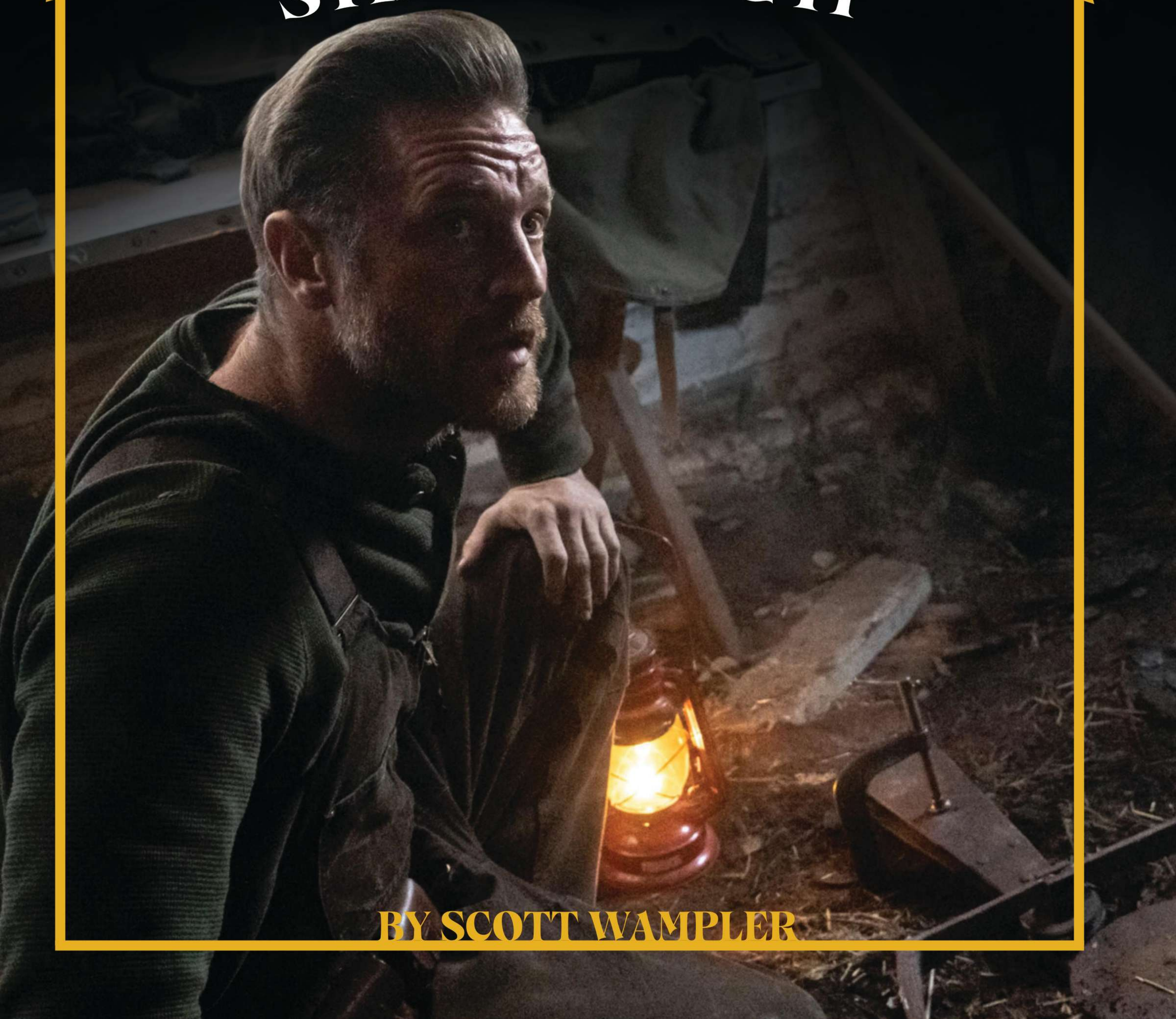
When retirement eventually comes, though, Acker says he is confident that the style of tattooing he helped popularize will continue to thrive. "When I meet these people at conventions, a lot of them will say that they saw my work in magazines when they were kids, and that's why they are doing what they are doing. So it's really flattering and reassuring to know that I helped influence so many talented artists in some capacity."

Acker smiles, seemingly content in the knowledge that the future of horror realism will be left in good claws. 💀



DEVON SAWA

STILL KILLING IT



BY SCOTT WAMPLER

For horror fans of a certain age, actor Devon Sawa has always been there. From 1995's *Casper* to 1999's *Idle Hands*, from the original *Final Destination* to last year's excellent *Hunter Hunter* and this year's hit TV series *Chucky*, Sawa has remained a reliable presence with an eye for interesting, sometimes unusual horror projects.

His recent efforts, which include a star turn in Glen Danzig's singular *Death Rider in the House of Vampires* and horror-comedy *Black Friday* (where he'll share the screen with the legendary Bruce Campbell), have been particularly exciting: you're never quite sure where Sawa will pop up next, but when he does you know you're in for something special.

Recently, FANGORIA had a chance to sit down with this iconic Canadian and catch up on some of his recent roles. Here's what he had to say for himself...

Your first real horror movie was 1999's *Idle Hands*, which has since become something of a cult classic. What do you remember about getting that gig?

I remember *going after* that job. First of all, I remember being fearless when I was that age. Something that I don't know whether I could do now. I remember it was at Sony and I was on the second or third callback, something like that. I had to audition for all the heads of Sony. And I walked into that room and threw myself over a table and into a wall using my hand. The hand wasn't even [a major element] in the first script. It was a couple of scenes and that was it. In that version, my mother gets possessed and it becomes a whole different thing. And then after I did this hand business at Sony, I think they decided to go all the way with the hand stuff.

A LIFE IN HORROR: SAWA IN *FINAL DESTINATION*, *IDLE HANDS*, *BLACK FRIDAY* AND (OPPOSITE PAGE) *HUNTER HUNTER*.

Your more recent projects have also found you working with interesting people and unique material. I'm very curious, for instance, what it was like acting opposite John Travolta in Fred Durst's *The Fanatic*.

That would've been the second time I worked with Travolta. The first and second experiences were very different from one another. On the first one, *Life on the Line*, he came to work and did his job and loved being there. He puts 100% into everything. But for *The Fanatic*, which was previously called *Moose*, he showed up every day as Moose. In character, all day. I mean, he legitimately believed in this movie.

Unfortunately, a couple things went wrong while we were shooting. For instance, there's a whole section of the finale that [had to be removed] because of copyright issues. Travolta was doing all these impersonations of different horror icons and movie stars. Everybody from Michael Madsen in *Reservoir Dogs* — he did Madsen's little dance, and the ear getting cut off — to Pennywise to Kathy Bates in *Misery*. All of a sudden he started rapping LL Cool J, "Rock The Bells." Full verses! It was awesome! And none of that made it into the movie because of copyright issues. I am fascinated that no one decided to look into that before we shot it all.

I'm fascinated to learn that Travolta knows full verses to "Rock The Bells."

To this day I still don't know why he does. That was not scripted.

A year after that, you join Shawn Linden's *Hunter Hunter*, which is straight-up one of the best, most surprising horror films of the past five years.

I thought people were like, "Yeah, I kind of like that," but I don't think I fully appreciated how much people like that film until [director Mike] Flanagan came up to me at The Saturn Awards. He's like, "Man, I love *Hunter Hunter*." I'm like, "Oh, yeah, thanks!" And then he goes, "No, dude. *Listen*. I *loved* the movie, lemme tell you about it." When he told me that I was like, "Wow, people really love this one..."

And I loved making it! [Co-star] Camille Sullivan is a goddamn force of nature, man. That girl has got chops and should do more. She is that movie's Sigourney-in-*Alien*. I don't know whether she's just in Canada or something, but man, she is a force.

Travolta was doing all these impersonations of different horror icons and movie stars. Everybody from Michael Madsen in *Reservoir Dogs* to Pennywise to Kathy Bates in *Misery*.

SAWA TANGLED WITH A VERY METHOD TRAVOLTA IN *THE FANATIC*.

PLAYING A DUAL ROLE ON *CHUCKY* MEANT (SPOILER) THAT SAWA GOT TO DIE TWICE.

PHOTOS COURTESY SYFY/USA NETWORK

For sure. That film, and its script, really subvert audience expectations, right up through the final shot.

Yeah. Hopefully everyone's seen it by now because this is a spoiler, but: when I first read the script, I had to put my ego aside because I die on page 38! I'm like, "Do I read on? How dare they?! I can't die on page 38! This is crazy!" But I read it, of course, and it's phenomenal. I got on the phone with the director and he told me why it's important that I die, and gave me the example of *Game of Thrones*, where Sean Bean's character dies at the end of the first season and you don't expect it. I was all in.

I assume you were a fan of the *Child's Play* franchise before the offer to do the *Chucky* TV series came along, yeah?

Oh, yeah. It wasn't hard to get me. I like them all, especially the first two. I prefer the originals, those '80s, early '90s horror films. So I love the first couple. Really, though, I just love Chucky, whatever he's in and whatever he's up to. I just love that character.

And how about working with Chucky himself, the FX work? Seems like that must be an elaborate process.

That's the one thing I've run into some problems with, but I've gotten better at dealing with it. The way I'm used to working is, I like to do scenes as a whole. Most actors like to work that way, too. You start and you run right through the whole scene, that way you build any emotions and you go high, you have lows. It's all within the scene, you capture all of it. Not so with *Chucky*. I had this one scene with Chucky where I'm playing drunk, and when shooting the puppet they prefer to go one line at a time, because they'll use different faces. Sometimes there are different bodies. If we need to see some legs, you gotta bring in another Chucky.

So, we shot this basically one line at a time. I had to play drunk one line at a time, which was very tricky, because you don't have anything to lead into the performance. But I got used to it. We figured it out! I'm just over here moaning and groaning about my scene with a plastic doll.

Another picture you recently made is *Death Rider in the House of Vampires*, with director Glen Danzig.

How could we leave that one out?

So, this is how *Death Rider* happened: I'm a huge Rob Zombie fan. I jumped to work with Fred Durst on *The Fanatic* because I'm a huge fan of Rob Zombie; I think these rock stars have a great energy to them. I want to do a horror movie with them! They just fit [the genre], y'know what I mean? And I had a great experience with Fred Durst. I thought he was awesome!

So, when I get the call about this project with Danzig, the lead singer of The Misfits, the first thing I thought was, "Okay, this is going to be another Rob Zombie/Fred Durst kind of thing." Well, the difference with Danzig was, he likes to control every aspect of the film. He really likes to micromanage everything and that's what was the case for the whole thing. I've still never seen it! I think it was just a different way to work for me. At the end of the day, though, we had a fun time. If I saw Danzig at Ralph's, I'd give him a hug. He's a good guy!

When I get the call about this project with Danzig the first thing I thought was, "Okay, this is going to be another Rob Zombie/Fred Durst kind of thing."

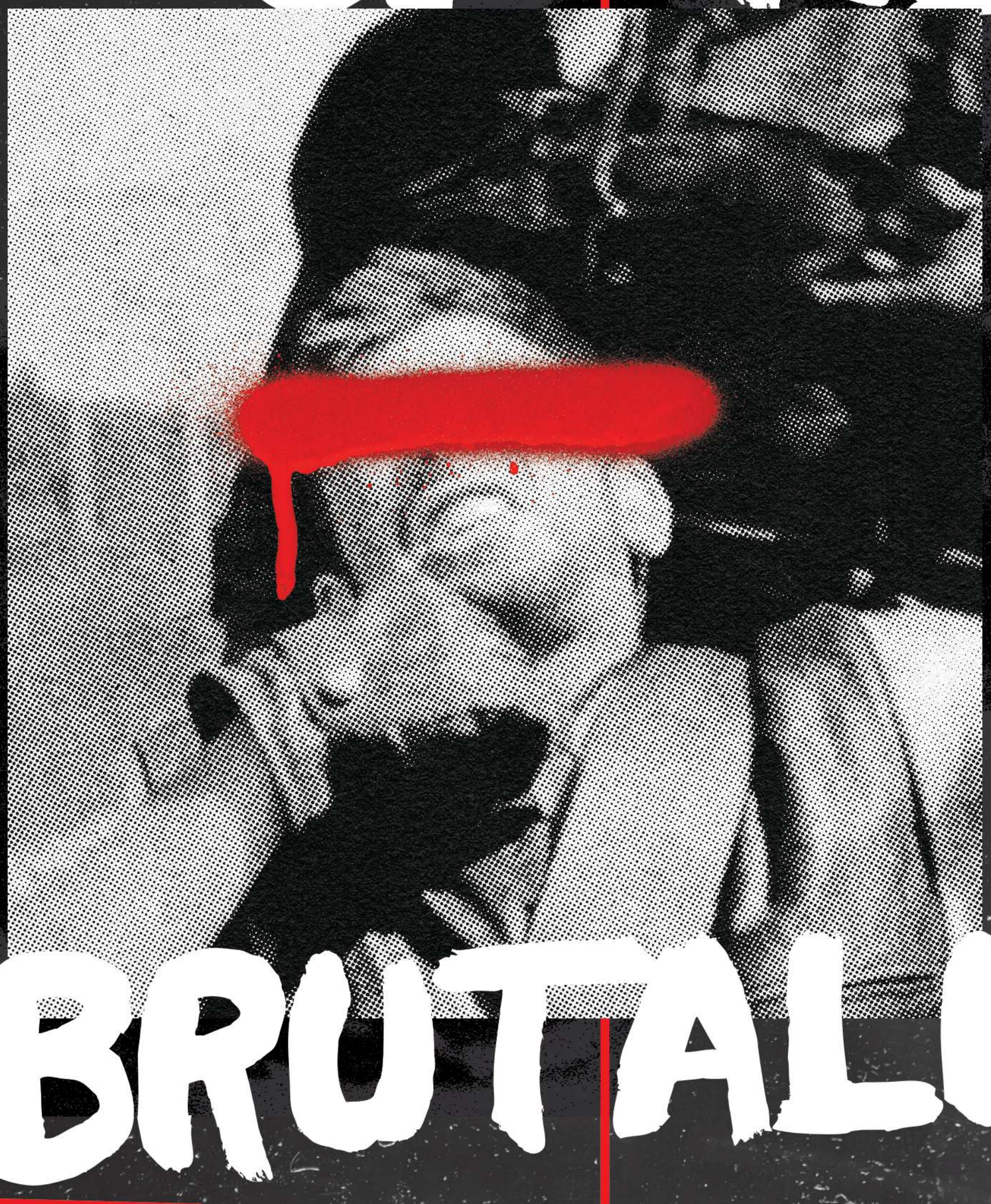
Yeah. And maybe one day he'll let you see the movie.

Maybe one day I'll get to see the movie! Yeah, I don't know. He invited me to a screening event that was in, I dunno, Joshua Tree, somewhere out in the fucking desert. I was like, "What? You want me to go where to watch the film?" It was some drive-in out in the middle of [nowhere]. I was like, "I don't know, man. I gotta catch the next one." 💀

SAWA NABBED THE TITLE ROLE IN DANZIG'S *DEATH RIDER IN THE HOUSE OF VAMPIRES* — AND HOPES TO SEE THE FILM ONE DAY.

THE CURIOUS WORLD OF CUSTOM-MADE QUEER KILLS

BESPOKE BRUTALITY



BY SEAN ABLEY

If you're a discerning murder video fetishist, and titles like "Tough Outlaw Blasted In Gut Then Strangled By Cowboy" or "Thomas Massacres His Roommates For Their High Collar Shirts" appeal to you, here's the best website you've never heard of – BESTDEATHS.com.

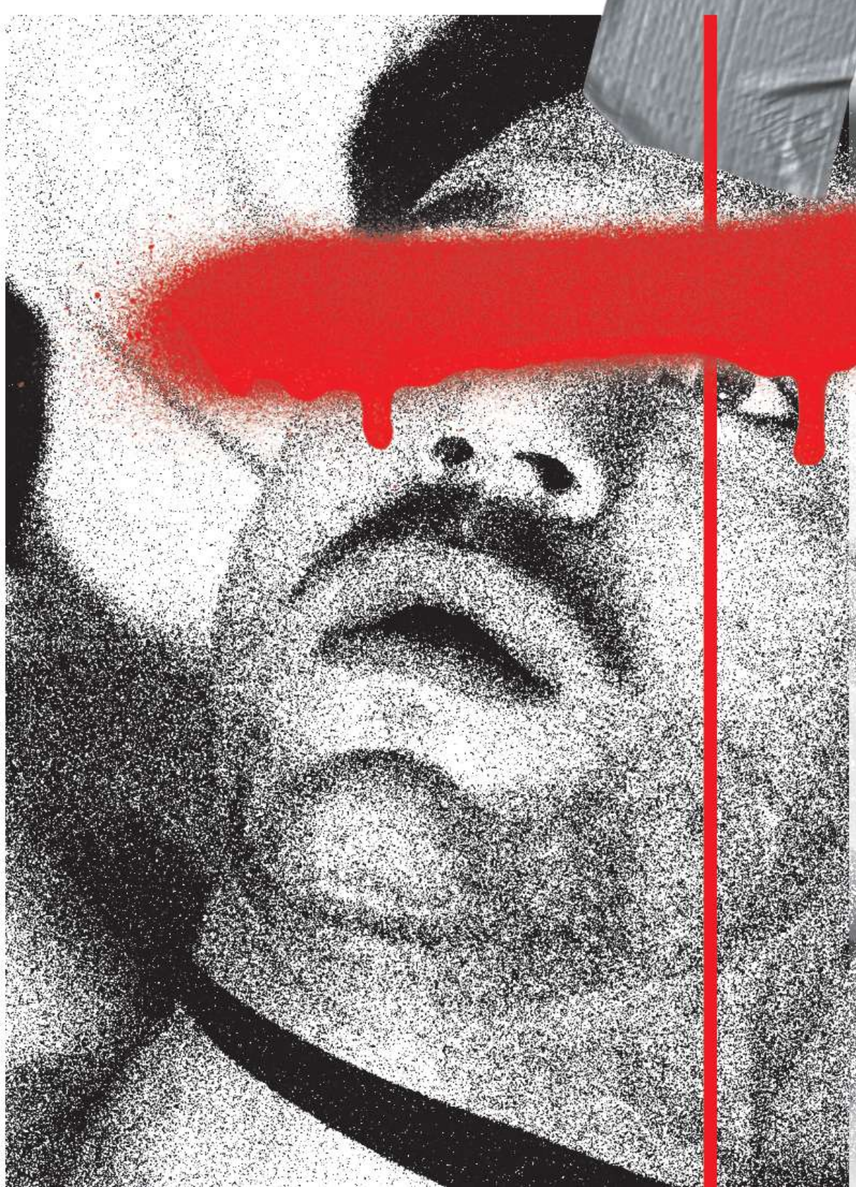
Claiming to have "The best collection of cutting edge independent and alternative horror... anywhere," Best Deaths' genealogy can be traced back to four production companies created and run by filmmakers Pete Jacelone and Alex Pucci: Scream Kings, Dead Guys Cinema, Serial Killers Underground, and THR Productions. The writer/directors spent the late 1990s through the 2000s producing homoerotic horror films like *Zombies* and *Das Hause*, grindhouse flicks like *Snuff Perversions: Bizarre Cases of Death*, and more mainstream fare like *Psycho Sisters*, *Frat House Massacre*, and their highest-profile release, *Camp Daze*. Then, "Around 2007, Alex discovered a group of teenage filmmakers online producing 'male victim' videos under the name of *Untold Horror*," explains Jacelone.

The leader of the *Untold Horror* pack was a young man named Bryan Roberts. The three filmmakers worked independently and occasionally together on many feature films and shorts over the years until 2011. "We decided to combine all of our films into one partnership. I believe Bryan thought of the name [Best Deaths] which was originally intended to be a site where fans of horror could upload their own homemade death scenes."

The site is now run by current webmaster, producer, and director, Victor Alfaro, who describes Best Deaths as a "video-on-demand website that features... horror and thriller short clips which usually end with a death scene." Although he lives in Mexico, Alfaro is truly a Hollywood success story, having worked his way up to producer and director after starting out as an actor with the site. "I auditioned for the guys back then. About six, seven years ago? More or less. I started acting for them, but then I got more involved in the whole production process."

Although Best Deaths features content produced specifically for the website, there is also a thriving made-to-order aspect to the company. Alfaro laughs when asked about what a typical content request might be. "There is no 'typical' request; that is the short answer. Some people are focused on the actor, they want to see action with a specific actor. Either he's strangled, stabbed, and whatnot. And some others, they're focused on the action. Like they want to see someone... let's say drown. They usually don't care who the actor is — we usually give them several options — but what they want to see is someone getting drowned. Some get very creative [with] stories, basic plots..." Are there requests from clients BestDeaths.com will turn down? "There is no limit on what the

"SOME PEOPLE LIKE APPLES, SOME PEOPLE LIKE ORANGES, SOME PEOPLE JUST LIKE TO WATCH OTHER GUYS DIE."



customers — well, there's *almost* no limit on what the customers can ask."

And to that point, despite the fun "What you see is what you get" titles of the videos, the tone of the material on Best Deaths can be a bit... intense. The performances tend to be unaffected and "real," as most of the actors aren't professional fetish models: they're either performers who were recruited or inexperienced actors who submitted their headshots and resumes via the site's casting link. With the exception of the feature films that have been cut into clips, the production value of the videos is decidedly home brewed. This all lends a cinema verité sheen to most of the content, which makes the overall vibe feel a bit... snuffy. And yet, the actors would tell you otherwise.

"The scenes are quite different. Morbid and whatnot, but they are also a lot of fun to do," offers Alfaro, who speaks from experience. "This is something that I hear from a lot of the actors, and yes, I think it as well. That's why I reached out to the guys from the beginning... I watched some of the scenes and I really liked them, and I could picture myself in either of the roles [victim or killer]. I [thought] that it would be a lot of fun, which it is."

When asked what makes a Best Deaths gig more enjoyable than a typical low-budget indie shoot for the actor, Alfaro offers more screen time than the murderous action takes up. "Because they are not the usual scenes that you act out in a short or even a feature film," he says, "where the attacks or the effects usually are very fast and they just last a moment, [Best Deaths' scenes] usually last a little bit, or a lot, longer." He makes sure the actors are absolutely comfortable with the material. "Basic actions, like getting punched, stabbed, strangled, and whatnot — they are down for that... After working together with some actors so many times, we get to know them and we get an idea of what we can ask from them."

Although the site's focus is very specific, Alfaro says there are more customers hungry for Best Deaths' killer content than you might guess. Most are quite pleasantly surprised when they first stumble upon this cyber Shangri-La of man-on-man murder vids. "They are surprised about a website that they can't believe they hadn't heard of or hadn't found before," Alfaro offers. And although indulging in Best Deaths' wares tends to be a solo activity, Alfaro says the customer base is also grateful for the site in a broader sense. "They are quite happy to see that there are other people who also like these [clips] because it's not — I don't feel like [it's] bad or wrong. It's just something that they like and they are not alone."

Alfaro waxes philosophical when asked about the fetishized nature of Best Deaths' catalog, and fetish videos in general. "Some people like apples, some people like oranges," he says. "Some people just like to watch other guys die." 💀

(THIS PAGE AND FACING) SOME OF THE HANDCRAFTED WARES THAT AWAIT YOU ON BESTDEATHS.COM.

THE UNSUNG CHAMPIONS OF KING

By Eric Vespe

AN EXPLORATION OF HOW BLACK AUDIENCES FIRST MADE STEPHEN KING A BOX OFFICE HIT

THE UNLIKELY DOUBLE FEATURE THAT MIGHT'VE MADE STEPHEN KING A HOUSEHOLD NAME.

Let's take a trip back in time to the early 1970s. Stephen King was an author on the rise. His first novel, *Carrie*, was published in April of 1974, but wasn't a best seller by any means, moving only a reported 13,000 copies in hardback. In fact, he didn't have a hardcover bestseller until *The Shining* in 1977, although it is fair to say his stuff sold like gangbusters in paperback. Considering his prominence in the field of popular fiction, it's hard to imagine today that Stephen King wasn't an overnight industry, born fully formed and ready to star in American Express commercials.

There are many reasons why King has established himself as the master of horror, not the least of which were the back-to-back bangers of *Carrie*, *'Salem's Lot*, *The Shining*, *The Stand* and *The Dead Zone*. But if you ask King himself, he'll tell you there's one reason his rocket really took off as quickly as it did, and that's Brian De Palma's film adaptation of *Carrie*.

Carrie wasn't a massive project when it was being made, at least not in the studio's eyes. It had a modest budget (reportedly $1.8 million), no giant names in front of the lens and an indie filmmaker calling the shots on his first real studio movie. It's easy to look back on the film's financial success, the Oscar nominations for Piper Laurie and Sissy Spacek, and the surprising amount of sequels and reboots to see how monumental *Carrie* was for the horror genre. But at the time, nobody knew it was going to be a monster hit, the studio included.

In order to drum up some buzz for the flick, the head honchos at MGM and United Artists decided to add *Carrie* to one of their already released pictures for a promotional double feature in the weeks before its release. You'd think that would be another horror movie, but you'd be wrong.

The movie was called *Norman... Is That You?*, a sex romp starring Red Foxx, Pearl Bailey, Blaxploitation super star Tamara Dobson, and Dennis Dugan. Yes, the same Dennis Dugan who would go on to direct a bazillion Adam Sandler movies.

Now, the most remarkable thing about that movie is how deeply problematic it is. The plot revolves around a father visiting his now-grown son only to find out that his boy is (gasp!) gay. The dad spends the rest of the movie trying to do everything he can to talk him out of it. Dugan plays the son's flamboyant boyfriend (whose catchphrase is "That's faaaabulous," if you want an idea of just how gently that movie handles queer stereotypes).

However, it is one of the most pivotal movies to ever come out, at least when looking at Stephen King's career.

Carrie is perhaps the whitest movie ever made and the studio decided to pair it with their sex comedy featuring an almost entirely Black cast. This could have spelled disaster, and in fact, King himself believed he was in for it when he sat down to see this very double feature in Boston on Halloween night in 1976.

He recalled that he and his wife, Tabitha, were the only two white people in the theater and was sure this crowd wasn't going to care at all about this awkward white girl getting bullied at school. When two particularly macho guys in front of the Kings jumped out of their chairs when Carrie White's hand popped up out of the ground for that final stinger, King had an indication that this film might actually catch on.

It's particularly interesting that the very first word of mouth about *Carrie* came from predominantly Black audiences, although it shouldn't be all that surprising. Despite most genre films sporting predominantly white casts, people of color have long been the bread and butter for horror movies. A 2018 study showed that the audience for "paranormal horror films" broke down to 58% people of color and 42% white.

Studios have known who was showing up for their genre fare for decades, so perhaps it was a keenly calculated decision to pair *Carrie* with *Norman... Is That You?*. But my instinct is it just happened to be the thing that was out at that particular moment, a random "this'll do" decision by the studio.

It paid off for Stephen King, though. His first book after the release of *Carrie* was *The Shining*, and it became his first hardcover bestseller. King's status as a household name was cemented by *Carrie*'s success and having been followed up by a book everyone was talking about around the water cooler.

There's a whole other essay that can be written about the marriage of King's written work and the movies made from them. But it's clear that King's pop culture dominance is tied to his work's near-constant adaptation, and those films and series becoming cultural events. That all began with *Carrie*, and the first audience to really get what he was laying down.

Would King have reached the same heights without those early word-of-mouth promotional double features? Most likely. His output at that time was so top-tier, there's no question he would have found his extremely large audience eventually. But it is very likely that it would have taken him a few more books to do it if *Carrie* wasn't the instant crowd-pleaser it was. 💀

You can listen to Scott Wampler (@ScottWamplerBMD) and Eric Vespe (@EricVespe) every Wednesday on THE KINGCAST (@Kingcast19), a Stephen King podcast for Stephen King obsessives, brought to you by the FANGORIA Podcast Network.

RATED XX/XY

THE CHILDREN OF HER RAGE

EMOTIONAL INHERITANCE AND THE LEGACY OF ANGER IN *THE BROOD*

BY ANYA STANLEY

My eldest son, Shane, has a birthday that coincides with the printing of this issue. He's a teenager, and starting to act up and act out, as teens do. When he's not sleeping or eating, he's pissed off. Suddenly, he's got a little bass in his chest and doesn't mind telling me what he thinks as I navigate our family's fifth year post-divorce.

It's been a long road. I went from being a stay-at-home parent who had the time to make Pinterest boards and cute bento box lunches to juggling four freelance jobs without a car or health insurance. Meanwhile, both of my children went from having a full, more traditional family to the Terrific Trio we're representing now. Unlike his younger brother, Shane is old enough to remember playing catch with Dad, and is therefore old enough to harbor resentment — the divorce, after all, was my idea, and I told him so when he asked. Outbursts happen, ostensibly about putting a patch on his taekwondo uniform or for moving something within his work desk system of organized chaos. Eventually, the real wound comes out, in so many words.

I didn't ask for any of this. I'm angry, but I love you, and I don't know what to do with that.

Through that lens, I see a lot of my own emotional minefields in my son's anger. The people-pleasing, the abandonment issues, the soreness that comes with not having the vocabulary to articulate where the hurt is. It's a small comfort in the name-it-to-tame-it sense. I can see where my child has inherited my emotional intensity, which makes it easier to help him navigate his.

The downside is that my child has inherited my emotional intensity.

This, wonderfully, is horror's purview. Parasitic fetuses and cursed, mutant progeny litter the genre, from *The Village of the Damned* to *Rosemary's Baby* and beyond. The 2018 success of Ari Aster's *Hereditary* showcased the evergreen fear of inherited doom. Famously cited by the director as "*Kramer vs. Kramer*, but more realistic," David Cronenberg's *The Brood* carries with it a grim authenticity that perfectly demonstrates the devastation of a broken family.

Cronenberg's work imbues the human body with meaning, which shifts over his decades-spanning career. *The Brood* brings up the rear of his earliest trio of features, all of which work their metaphors and social ills through predatory women. *Shivers* sees a promiscuous woman spreading a parasitic disease throughout an apartment building, while the woman whose experimental surgery launched a rage pandemic in *Rabid* refuses to accept that she is Patient Zero for the collapse of society.

Later on, the director would dissect his own anxieties and his work would focus on mentally violated men in rapid-fire succession: *Scanners*, *Videodrome*, and *The Dead Zone* were released in a three-year span. The Canadian filmmaker would round out the '80s with a metamorphosis. With *The Fly*

"THE *KRAMER VS. KRAMER* OF HORROR" FINDS FRANK (ART HINDLE) AND NOLA (SAMANTHA EGGAR) AT EXTREME ODDS.

in 1986 and *Dead Ringers* two years later, his stories found more menace in the minds of men and the systems they uphold.

But in 1979, Cronenberg located his horror in a woman, a mother, and she is once again partially responsible, alongside science, for a grand disruption of The Way Things Are. But as he works his way through his doubts and revulsions, Cronenberg creates a breakdown of the traditional family unit, one that hits differently when engaging with the movie as a single mother.

The Brood observes the Carveth family — father Frank (Art Hindle), mother Nola (Samantha Eggar), and daughter Candice (Cindy Hinds) — in decline. As Frank and Nola are going through a contentious divorce and custody battle, Nola's baggage is so heavy that she seeks therapy at the Somafree Institute, under the watchful eye of Oliver Reed's Dr. Raglan.

The film opens with a therapeutic roleplaying session at the institute. Dr. Raglan, acting as an abusive father as part of the exercise, intentionally misgenders his patient Michael as "Michelle" to emasculate him and rebuke his emotions. "Weakness is more acceptable in a girl," the doctor sneers.

For all of their perceived weakness, it's women who dominate the story. The men are ineffectual; Frank is powerless to shield Candice from the fallout of his marriage, just as Nola's father (Henry Beckman), failed to protect her from her abusive mother, Juliana (Nuala Fitzgerald). *The Brood* walks in on the dying gasps of both relationships, just in time to witness their toxicities deform the next generation.

After goading his charge to tears, Dr. Raglan entreats Michael to become even more vulnerable as he works through his daddy issues; this is the heart of psychoplasmics, a fictional, rogue psychiatric treatment. "Show me your anger! Show me so I can understand it!" Michael obliges, tearing away his shirt to reveal boil-like sores peppering his upper body.

It's a Cronenberg Special, a physical deformity or mutation sprouting from science and hubris. Here, the science is Dr. Raglan's

NOLA PRODUCES ANOTHER CHILD OF RAGE.

psychoplasmics that encourages patients to translate their psychic wounds into physical ones. This manifests in various ways, with some patients developing cancer as a result of the treatment. But for Nola, it presents in a more Grecian sense.

Similar to how the goddess Athena is said to have been birthed from the split skull of Zeus, Nola's anger and paranoia spawn a brood of rage-babies (born without navels, an autopsy reveals), who act on behalf of their mother's anxieties with extreme prejudice.

"He encouraged my body to rebel against me, and it did," says former patient Jan Hartog (Robert A. Silverman), sporting a foul growth from his neck. "I have a small revolution on my hands."

Nola's small revolution doesn't destroy her from the inside, as most mental carry-on does, but rather lashes out externally as their mother commands. While Nola rehashes her childhood abuse to Dr. Raglan at the Institute, her mother Juliana is fatally attacked by what appears, at first, to be a small child or a dwarf in a red winter coat like Candice's. Using whatever is available, these broodlings savagely beat to death any threat to Nola's psyche. She doesn't have to command them to kill, as there is no real line of demarcation between mind and body under Cronenberg's lens. They spring into action from Nola's emotions, much like how my son and I spit venom to protect our egos and ourselves. Watching the little red-clad beast go to town on Oma's face, I see Shane slamming a door on me after I said something that would probably disappoint my therapist. I see how much of my family's damage is self-inflicted.

Candice sees her grandmother's assailant but keeps quiet, the first of many traumas she'll swallow as a child of divorce. As Nola's little broodlings dispatch anyone she calls out — her domineering mother, her abuse-enabling father, Candice's schoolteacher, and eventually Dr. Raglan — Candice has an ever-receding pocket of stability in her world.

The feeling I have while watching the little girl isn't one of pity, but that of being called out. I'm woefully unprepared when it comes to counseling my kid on shaving or making friends within the teen boy thicket of masculinity, with all of its unspoken rules and regulations. I've seen the look on his face when the school announces an upcoming Father's Day event. It's not one that blames me at all, but rather a faraway look that tells me that *this isn't how things are supposed to be*.

That's an extension of the director's attitude, to be sure. We're talking about a movie in which the monster is a woman who can reproduce non-traditionally, and whose hysteria contributes to the breakdown of an old-school, male-dominated family unit. *The Brood* is, after all, Cronenberg's own psychoplasmics session, bloodletting the frustrations of his divorce onto the script. But for Cronenberg, the scariest part of divorce is not the end of the good, but the mutated perpetuity of the bad.

And so, when most of the 92-minute runtime runtime has elapsed and Nola and her minions are dead, Frank carries his shaken, bloodied daughter to the car, telling her "We're going home." Candice, who by now has discovered her grandmother's bludgeoned body and witnessed her teacher being murdered (on top of the countless little pre-divorce wounds children are burdened with, like overheard arguments and tested loyalties), stares into the distance — it's unclear if she even hears her father.

Candice's tear-streaked face gives way to a shot of her hand, on which there sit a pair of fresh boils. Nola's small revolution, inherited from Juliana's rage and blended with the festival of pain heralded by divorce, lives on in her daughter.

The Brood is a horror movie about perpetuation as much as it is about severance, and as my oldest matures another year, Cronenberg's monster movie serves as a cautionary tale for divorcees: Some wounds can surface long after the ink dries on that court ruling. 💀

CANDICE (CINDY HINDS) IS TRAUMATIZED BY THE ATTACK ON DR. RAGLAN (OLIVER REED).

PREVIOUSLY ON...

FANGORIA PRESENTS

Elijah Wood

Ana Lily Amipour

Bryan Fuller

Emily V Gordon

David Lowery

Joe Lynch

Don Coscarelli

Barbara Crampton

James III

Issa Lopez

Katie Siegel

Thomas Jane

Logan Marshall-Green

Mallory O'Meara

Mick Garris

A Stephen King Podcast For Stephen King Obsessives

THE KINGCAST

Hosted by Scott Wampler and Eric Vespe

Proudly Hosted By The FANGORIA Podcast Network

NEW EPISODES EVERY WEDNESDAY, WHEREVER PODCASTS CAN BE FOUND.

Rian Johnson

Guillermo del Toro

Meredith Borders

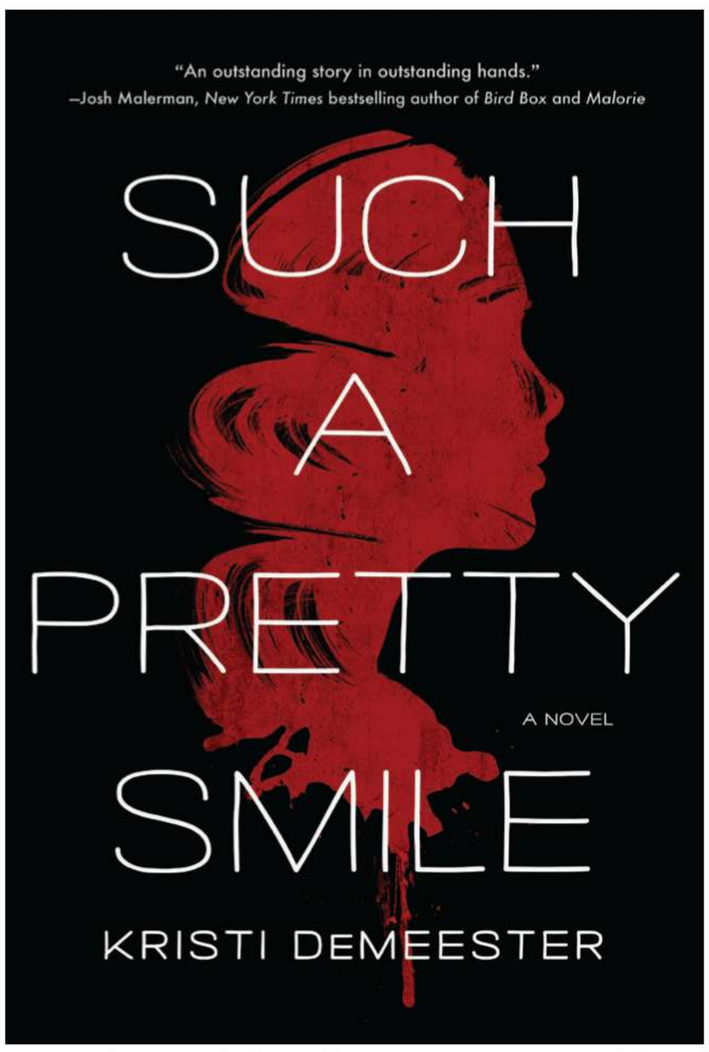
Wynter Mitchell

Mike Flanagan

@Kingcast19

NIGHTMARE LIBRARY

BY AHLISSA EICHHORN


"An outstanding story in outstanding hands."
—Josh Malerman, New York Times bestselling author of Bird Box and Malorie
SUCH A PRETTY SMILE
A NOVEL
KRISTI DEMEESTER

SUCH A PRETTY SMILE

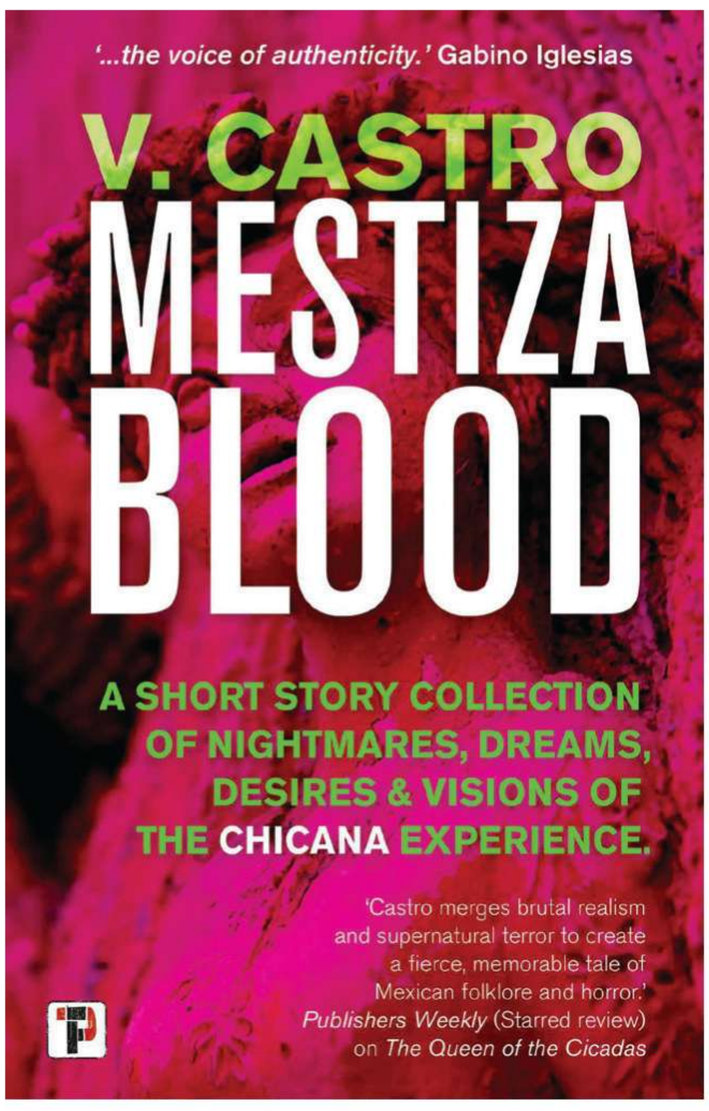
DUE OUT:
1/18/2022

AUTHOR:
Kristi Demeester

PUBLISHER:
St. Martin's Press

Such A Pretty Smile is a time-shifting commentary involving The Cur, a serial killer who murders pubescent women, a mother with a history of seeing "beasts," and her young daughter, who is starting to experience an inner terror she can't share with anyone. Realizing their frightening experiences are linked, the two women work to unveil their spiteful oppressor and understand each other's plight. The psychological novel combines fever dreams and mean-spirited gore to bluntly convey how society punishes girls when they step out of line and how they choose to fight back.

A self-proclaimed writer of "pretty, spooky things," Kristi DeMeester's latest work is a seeming response to years of female conditioning and how to "learn not to get your feelings hurt." In one of her essays, titled "What Horror Taught Me About Being A Woman," she relays the shame she was subjected to for loving the genre and the eventual hate mail she would receive about her fiction. The messages drove home that, "If you are a woman, you shouldn't have these thoughts. And God help you if you express them." DeMeester gathered these drops of bitter fuel to ignite her sharp-minded fiction and shed unabashed light on a grim saga that personifies the legacy of dread that follows women throughout their lives.


'...the voice of authenticity.' Gabino Iglesias
V. CASTRO
MESTIZA BLOOD
A SHORT STORY COLLECTION OF NIGHTMARES, DREAMS, DESIRES & VISIONS OF THE CHICANA EXPERIENCE.
'Castro merges brutal realism and supernatural terror to create a fierce, memorable tale of Mexican folklore and horror.' Publishers Weekly (Starred review) on The Queen of the Cicadas

MESTIZA BLOOD

DUE OUT:
1/22/2022

AUTHOR:
V. Castro

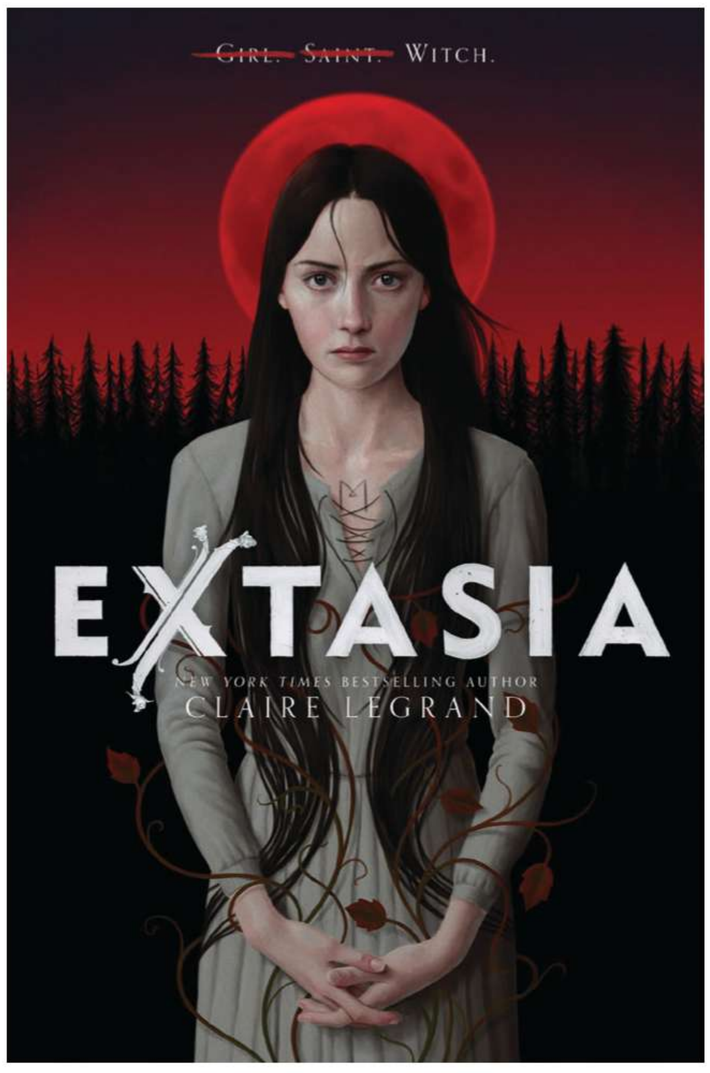
PUBLISHER:
Flame Tree Press

Gathered into one culturally rich collection, *Mestiza Blood* is an exploration of urban legends and folktales told from a Mexican American background. Drawing from life experiences and submission limitations, the author cultivated a one-woman horror show and unleashed it upon the masses in the form of 14 short stories. They're guaranteed to pull readers through all kinds of nightmarish landscapes while introducing main characters — from undead cholas to the terrifying La Lechuza — who proudly brandish their Latin heritage.

With a growing female-centric bibliography, Castro has quickly become an author you can rely on to write real women with real thoughts and actions. Following her novel *Queen of the Cicadas*, *Mestiza Blood* continues her quest to amplify the overlooked Latinx voice in dark fiction while simultaneously bolstering herself as a prominent name in the genre. When asked what she hopes readers will take away from this compendium, she stated, "I hope they put it down and think how they have never read anything like it before. I would like their imagination to be sparked enough to buy more books by Latinx writers. Our narratives have value."

HORROR AND THE FEMALE GAZE ARE THE ULTIMATE POWER COUPLE.

Not only is horror a cathartic and raw means of expression, but women's perspective in literature and media is richly expansive. Their stories can be responses. They can be announcements or lessons. Moreover, they're concurrently singular but unifying experiences that are unique to us and our voices. The four books below are stories from the perspectives of women from different origins, cultures, and stops on the timeline of life. Their topics and intentions vary, yet they all prove that doing anything "like a girl" is one of the highest compliments.



EXTASIA

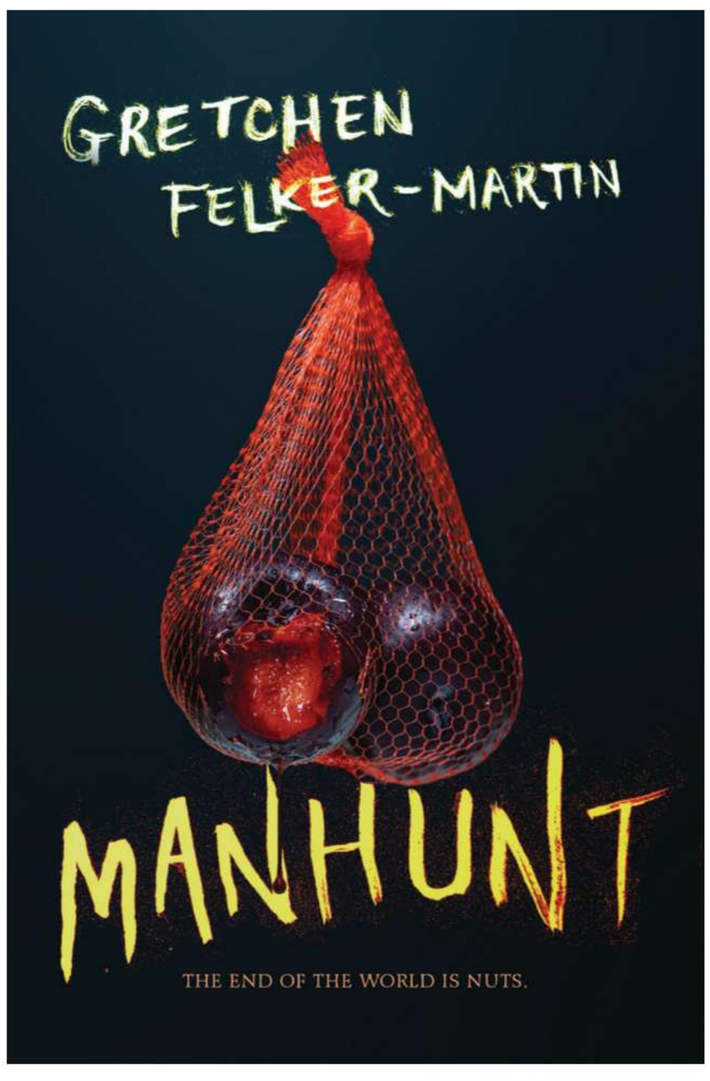
DUE OUT:
2/22/2022

AUTHOR:
Claire Legrand

PUBLISHER:
Katherine Tegen Books

Dark history and chilling fantasy collide in *Extasia*, the story of a nameless girl who is about to become a saint. After years of mental abuse and suppression, she and her peers will surrender their bodies to be beaten to bear the sins of their puritanical village. But she's soon conflicted about her newfound status of redemption. Her people are in need of help, but the witches and white-eyed monsters from the outside are calling to her and denying every truth she's ever known.

Trading a career in the music industry for the library lifestyle, award-winning author Claire Legrand harbors an undeniably die-hard fan base. Previous hits like her *Furyborn* series and *Sawkill Girls* led readers to celebrate Legrand's limitless imagination and seamless inclusion of sapphic characters in her narratives. With *Extasia*, they're integral parts to discussing systemic homophobia, misogyny and the scars of religious trauma. This is a book that will snarl at you from every direction, but once you break through the almost unavoidable anxiety and anger, you're left feeling that you can be free from any bondage that's ever been placed upon you.



MANHUNT

DUE OUT:
2/22/2022

AUTHOR:
Gretchen Felker-Martin

PUBLISHER:
Tor Nightfire

Manhunt describes a ruined world where men are overtaken by a virus that turns them into pack animal-like creatures that savage anything that breathes. Surviving cis women stay hidden or turn into groups of militant hunters that seek out anything they perceive as a threat, especially the trans women and men who are left to their own isolated struggle for identity and survival.

This fantastically gritty tale is the newest, ballsiest take on post-apocalyptic horror that holds no constraints on visceral content or what refreshing conversations can be brought to the genre when transgender and nonbinary characters are given their chance in the driver's seat. Author and film critic Gretchen Felker-Martin wanted to offer a complex view of gender and "all the other weird and marvelous things humans can be." She took inspiration from the literature that was pivotal to her during her own journey as an out trans woman, and crafted a book that's welling with important commentary and a cry to "fight to be kind and uproot the transphobia culture plants in our hearts."

That's not to say *Manhunt* is all substance and no fluff, though. The pages are filled with the grotesque, the uncomfortable, and plenty of vein-quivering action. As Gretchen accurately said, "Trans people deserve to write nasty, freaky stories just as much as anyone else does."

Contributors' Crypt

Keep up with our contributors' latest ghoulish goings-on via their social media accounts!

Sean Abley - @GayoftheDead

Rodney Ascher - @Rodney_Ascher

Jason Baker - @bakingjason

Brian Collins- @BrianWCollins

Barbara Crampton - @barbaracrampton

Matt Donato - @DoNatoBomb

Ahlissa Eichhorn - @hauntedeadlines

Chris Evangelista - @cevangelista413

Dan Fraga - @exhumedfilms

Dr. James Francis, Jr. - @DrJamesFilmTV

Brett Gallman - @brettgallman

Rich Johnson - @richpieces

Vanessa McKee - @vmenendezb

Richard Newby - @RICHARDLNEWBY

Jolene Richardson - @JoMarieDesigns

Mike Scollins - @mikescollins

Jourdain Searles - @judysquirrels

Spicy Donut - @ spicydonut

Anya Stanley - @BookishPlinko

Eric Vespe - @EricVespe

Scott Wampler - @ScottWamplerBMD

Samuel Zimmerman - @samdzimmerman

CLASSIFIED AD VAULT

TheHomicidalHomemaker.com
Horror-Themed Recipes, Tutorials, & More!

The werewolves are singing! Midnight Musicals Presents Total Horror Show, a Queer horror musical podcast. Check us out wherever you listen to podcasts!

Are you HOT FOR CREATURE?: Do Werewolves make you howl? Do vampires make your blood pump? If so, join Robb and Dylan on a journey through the history of creature features, one monster at a time! Find HOT FOR CREATURE podcast on your favorite podcatcher!

I've been making homemade horror movies since 2012. They are all on my YouTube channel. Even the embarrassingly bad ones. I will never delete them. Subscribe at Zomboy Productionz.

Spank - thanks for morning coffee, oatmeal (HEALTH!) and forcing me to go to the doctor. <3

Do you enjoy horror & comedy? Check out the Spooky Doings podcast! Interviews, panel discussions, improvised movie reviews & more. Available on Apple podcasts, Spotify & podbean.

Melody-conscious guitar-driven power-pop! Check out my music at derekevry.com …now with hyphens!

Mel, You probably won't read this in an issue of FANGORIA. Yet, I will tell you this for the rest of our lives to your face. I love you. - Justin

Happy new year to our longtime home entertainment advisor Mitchel, and the brownie-baking bad influence Carol!

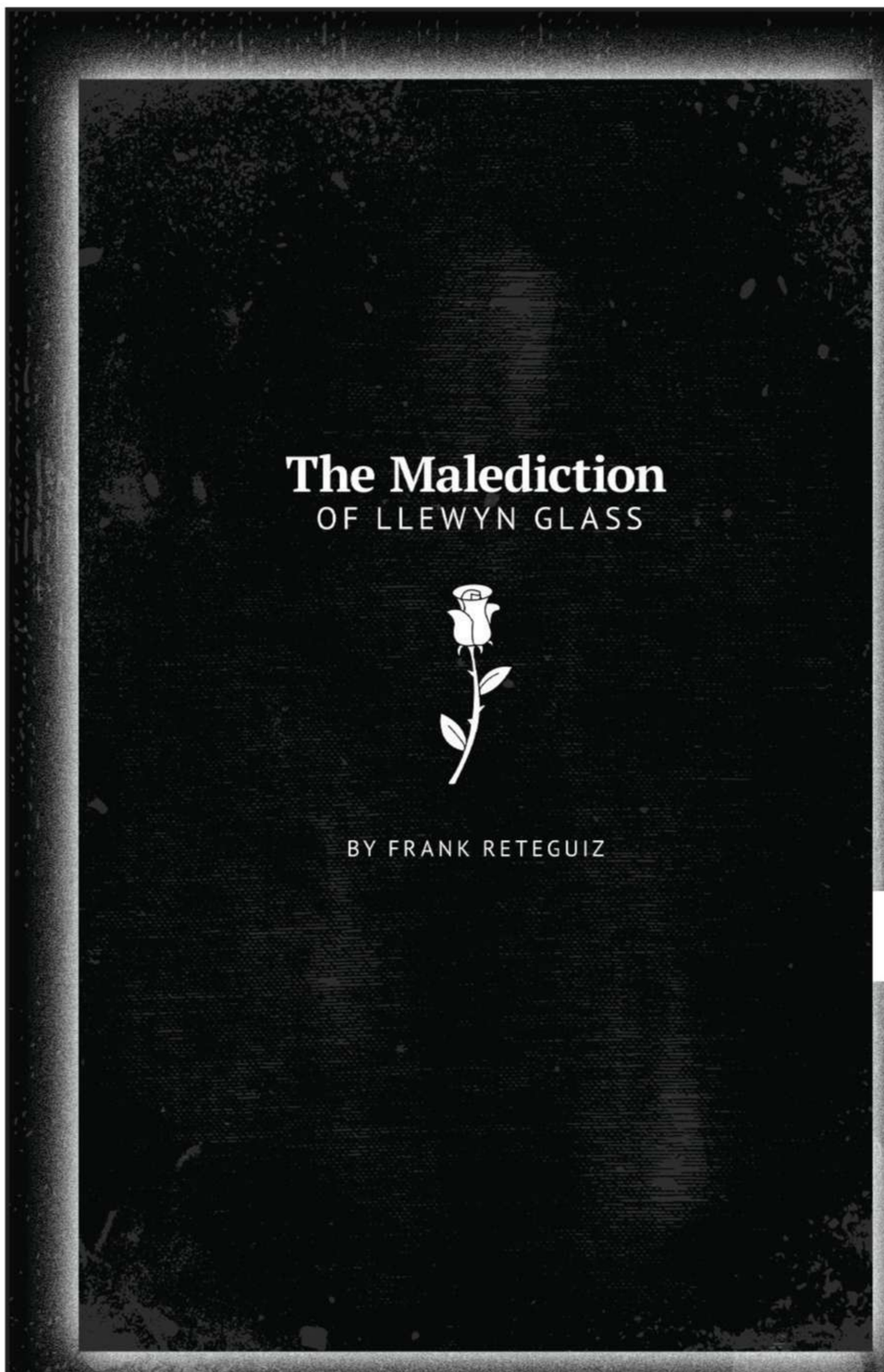
Come listen to The Horror Hour, the place where we discuss, debate, and disagree on all things horror. We've got rankings, reviews, interviews, and more. You just won't find love here.

Visit AisleSeat.com regularly for reviews of horror movies, genre films, blockbusters, arthouse fare, and more. Critics Choice Association member Mike McGranaghan will keep you up to date on the movies you need to see.

Listen to the Scary Friend Scaring Friends Podcast!

Things to Come

What things will spring bring? The Chainsaw Awards, for one. The return of a horror icon in a surprising medium, for another. As for the rest… be here in April and find out!



"YOU'RE ONLY AS NOBLE AS YOUR CHOICES, MR. GLASS"

Would you sell your soul to the Devil to save the one you love? Llewyn Glass, a disillusioned lawyer and former Catholic priest, sold his soul to the Devil to save the love of his life, only to find out he was conned into doing so. With only a few months left to live, he has until Halloween to find a way out of his deal or he'll spend eternity in Hell. Assisted by the mysterious but well-connected Sister Abigail, Llewyn is sent across the world to face gods and monsters in the hope that his strange odyssey will lead to his salvation. But every solution he finds comes with a price which may not cost only his soul but all of humanity.

Available on **Amazon** and **Barnes & Noble**

"This novel was beyond all of my expectations!"
- Krimini

"Written with an exciting ebb and flow that feel natural (like a good fireside story). It's hard to put down."
- Meghan F.

TOM SAVINI'S

Special Make-Up Effects Program

20 YEARS

TRAINING THE MOST INCREDIBLE CREATIVE PEOPLE IN THE INDUSTRY!

HALL OF FAME
BEST PIECE BY YEAR

2001
Derek Krout

2002
Troy Smith

2003
Tate Steinsiek

2004
Josh Roth

2005
Kevin Kirkpatrick

2006
Dustin Heald

2007
Tyler Green

2008
Otto Marlow

2009
Cig Neutron

2010
Daran Holt

2011
Ryan Pintar

2012
Cassandra Melena

2013
Shannon Burla

2014
Wesley South

2015
Ricky Vitus

2016
Nora Hewitt

2017
Jason Green

2018
Izzy Quack

2019
Samantha Trouten

2020
Matt Patterson

WE ARE PROUD OF OUR GRADS

DOUGLAS
Education Center
130 Seventh Street • Monessen, PA 15062

724-684-3684 **DEC.EDU**

Financial aid is available to those who quality. *16-month Associate in Specialized Business Degree Program.
THIS SCHOOL IS AUTHORIZED UNDER FEDERAL LAW TO ENROLL NONIMMIGRANT ALIEN STUDENTS.
HOUSING provided by - **bdihousing.com**

HOW TO CUT OUT AND ASSEMBLE MASK

1. Cut along dots
2. Cut out eyes
3. Punch holes in side flaps
4. Fasten string to both holes

THE BLACK PHONE

IN THEATERS FEBRUARY 4

FREE CUT-OUT GRABBER MASK

COMPLETE THE LOOK WITH A BLACK BALLOON!